**9 Netiquette Guidelines Online Students Need to Know**

By [Will Erstad](http://www.rasmussen.edu/student-life/blogs/author-archives/Will%20Erstad) on 9/25/2014[1 Comment](http://www.rasmussen.edu/student-life/blogs/college-life/netiquette-guidelines-every-online-student-needs-to-know/#disqus_thread)

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Proper etiquette is nothing new for most people. You grew up with your parents constantly telling you to mind your manners. But for those who grew up without some sort of computer screen inches from their face at all times, proper “netiquette” may seem a bit mystifying. We’re here to help with nine simple guidelines for how to be on your best behavior in an online classroom.

As you might have guessed, netiquette is essentially rules and norms for interacting with others on the internet. We enlisted Rasmussen College’s Heather Zink, who has taught online courses for seven years, to explain some guidelines to make sure your online manners are up to par.

9 netiquette guidelines every online student needs to know

1. NO YELLING, PLEASE

There’s a time and a place for everything—BUT IN MOST SITUATIONS TYPING IN ALL CAPS IS INAPPROPRIATE. Most readers tend to perceive it as shouting and will have a hard time taking what you say seriously, no matter how intelligent your response may be. If you have vision issues—there are [ways to adjust how text displays](http://www.afb.org/info/living-with-vision-loss/using-technology/using-a-computer/tips-for-computer-users-with-low-vision/1235) so you can still see without coming across as “yelling.”

2. Sarcasm can (and will) backfire

“You really need to be overly polite and ensure there is no sarcastic tone in your message,” Zink says. You never know who is reading your comment on the other end, so she says you should never assume the reader will pick up on your sarcasm.

Sarcasm has been the source of plenty of misguided arguments online, as it can be incredibly difficult to understand the commenter’s intent. What may seem like an obvious joke to you could come across as off-putting or rude to those who don’t know you personally.  As a rule of thumb, it’s best to avoid sarcasm all together in an online classroom.

3. Attempt to find your own answer

“Make an effort to exhaust your search options before asking a question,” Zink suggests. She says it can be frustrating for instructors when students ask questions that are clearly answered within the assignment instructions or course materials.

For questions related to class structure such as due dates or policies, refer to your syllabus and course FAQ.  Attempt to find the answers to any other questions on your own using a search engine like Google or Bing. Relatively simple questions can usually be answered within seconds—which saves everyone time. If your questions remain unanswered after a bit of effort, feel free to bring them up with your instructor.

4. Stop ... grammar-time!

Always make an effort to use proper punctuation, spelling and grammar. Trying to decipher a string of misspelled words with erratic punctuation frustrates the reader and distracts from the point of your message. Take the time to spell check any message you send and save everyone the headache.

On the other hand, it’s important to be reasonable about others’ grammar mistakes. Nobody likes the grammar police and scolding a classmate because he or she used “your” instead of “you’re” isn’t practicing proper netiquette.  If a classmate makes a simple mistake in a message that is otherwise coherent, give them a break.

5. Don’t get cute with text colors

While it may be tempting to write all messages in neon green, whoever is reading it may not appreciate it as much as you. Stick to the basic black text color—if you need to emphasize something in your sentence use **bold** or *italicized* words. This will help ensure everyone can easily read your message without acquiring a headache.

6. Brevity rules

Keep email messages short and to the point.  You don’t need to share your life story to ask for help with a problem—just focus on the essential information. This will ensure your question doesn’t get lost in the noise and saves time for everyone involved.

“The more direct you can be in your question, the quicker the response you will get,” Zink says. She suggests including a numbered or bulleted list if you have multiple comments or questions in order to make it clear and concise for the reader.

7. Read first

Take some time to read through each of the previous discussion post responses before writing your own response.  If the original post was asking a specific question, there’s a good chance someone has already answered it. Submitting an answer that is eerily similar to a classmate’s indicates to the instructor that you haven’t paid attention to the conversation thus far.

Remember, discussions can move fairly quickly so it’s important to absorb all of the information before [crafting your reply](http://www.rasmussen.edu/student-life/blogs/online-learning/digital-literacy-dos-and-donts-discussion-posts/). Building upon a classmate’s thought or attempting to add something new to the conversation will show your instructor you’ve been paying attention.

8. Don’t over share

Personal information is valuable to identity thieves, so try not to share more than is necessary. We’re not suggesting your classmates are criminals, but it’s good practice in general to be guarded when it comes to personal information.  Zink says a good rule of thumb to follow is if you’re comfortable standing up in front of a classroom and saying your message, then it’s most likely okay to share.

9. Be kind

Communicating online is unique in that there tends to be a level on anonymity between the people who are interacting. This sometimes results in individuals being more impolite than they might be in person. In an online class, you might not have the complete anonymity that comes with using a screen name, but you likely won’t see your classmates face-to-face. Make a point to be respectful in your comments—even if you disagree or dislike someone’s stance on a topic.

Zink recommends taking time to think and relax before firing off a reply in the heat of a disagreement. “Wait a day. If you still feel like you need to reply you’ll be more composed and won’t say something you’ll regret later,” she says. “Even though other students can’t see you, your name is attached to that comment and your classmates and instructors will remember it if you’ve been rude.”

Practice makes perfect

You’ve just completed your crash course in netiquette guidelines, so go out there and post like the well-mannered students you are! For more tips and guides for navigating the online world, check out**[5 Ways to Develop Your Digital Literacy Skills](http://www.rasmussen.edu/student-life/blogs/college-life/ways-to-develop-digital-literacy-skills/" \t "_blank)**