

Quick guide to professional online communication for your students

With the dearth of new-to-online learning and teaching happening this fall, it's important to remember your online manners. Share these tips with your students to help set expectations for a successful semester, but these reminders can apply to everyone communicating online!

REMEMBER THE HUMAN

Follow the Golden Rule: "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." When communicating online, always treat others respectfully. Before you submit your work, be sure to ask yourself how you would feel if you saw someone else writing or saying the same thing. If you wouldn't behave in a certain way in person, don't act that way online.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Depending on what platform you're using and who you're communicating with, certain slang, emojis, textspeak and shorthand may not be acceptable. Generally speaking, err on the side of professional language. You never know when you might be talking to a future employer, reference or colleague! Consider the impact of your tone as well. "Hey, lol" with a smiley face may not be the best way to start an email to your instructor or classmate.

MAKE YOUR MEANING CLEAR

When using electronic communication, be clear and concise. We all communicate in our own ways, but it's easy to misunderstand someone online due to cultural, language or personality differences without the benefit of nonverbal body language. If you're in a Zoom class, be conscious of your classmates' time and keep your interactions on topic so everyone has time to contribute.

MAKE YOURSELF LOOK GOOD

Be sure to conduct yourself in a way that you will be respected. Make a good first impression! For virtual classes, dress at least as nicely as you would in a face-to-face class. When writing, check your grammar and spelling and make sure your contribution is meaningful and respectful.

BE A FIREFIGHTER, NOT A FIRE STARTER

Do not bait (also known as "flaming") others with aggressive language or purposefully antagonistic contributions.



Neuroscience shows us that people do not learn well when they are afraid or angry. College courses explore mature subject matter that people may have strong opinions and feelings about. Keep your contributions rooted in the learning topic and recognize that everyone has various backgrounds and life experiences.

RESPECT PRIVACY

You may learn very personal information about someone via the various forms of electronic communication and online discussion. A good rule of thumb is to always assume you should keep personal information private unless you ask first about sharing or are told otherwise.

BE COMPASSIONATE

There are many levels of familiarity with technology and mistakes are bound to be made. You may think a post or comment is pointless, you could come across misspelled words, or encounter a student who forgets to mute themselves on a Zoom meeting. Remember that we're all learning together and consider just letting go of small errors and social gaffes. If you feel something truly needs to be corrected for the good of the class, send the person a private message or contact the instructor first.

References

Ross, S. T. (n.d.). The core rules of netiquette. Retrieved from <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>