

Online Communication

Communicating in person is different from communicating online. When you communicate with someone face to face, you can hear their tone of voice, see their facial expressions, body language, and hand gestures. These methods of communicating cannot be relied upon in the online environment.

Following the online communication guidelines can assist you in being a successful online learner. In this overview of online communication we will discuss the types of online communication, netiquette, some general tips for communicating online, and some tips for communicating on discussion boards and email.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication

To begin, synchronous and asynchronous are two types of online communication.

Synchronous Communication

Synchronous communication occurs at the same time (real time) but in different places. A telephone is an example of synchronous communication. Other examples include chat, video conferencing, Skype, and a whiteboard. You may be accustomed to using some of these tools to communicate with friends and family outside an educational setting.

Because synchronous communication involves being online during a specific time frame, your instructor will most likely inform you in advance of a scheduled communication session. He or she may give you a question to consider before the session or assign you to a small group that you will be communicating within the session. Your instructor may also open up the synchronous communication tool for less structured events, such as online office hours or small group activities.

Asynchronous Communication

Asynchronous communication occurs at different times and in different places allowing you to communicate at your convenience rather than real time. Asynchronous activities allow each voice to be heard, whether you are participating in a small or large group. Some of the tools that you can use for asynchronous communication include e-mail and discussion forums. You might also use social media such as Facebook, twitter, or blogs.

Netiquette

In order to ensure that your online communication is effective and appropriate you can follow some general guidelines. Although you might be accustomed to using forms of electronic communication, like text messaging and chat, communicating as part of a course involves a slightly different set of skills and conventions commonly referred to as "netiquette." Netiquette is essentially the use of courtesy and respect in the online

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environment. The reading for this module includes a [set of core rules](#) for proper online behavior.

Remember on the other side of the email or that discussion post is a human. Consider whether or not you would say what you are typing to the other person if you were seeing them face to face.

The online world truly is the “real” world, thus, it is important to follow the same standards of behavior that you follow in your face to face world.

It is important to keep in mind the context and audience of your message. Netiquette does vary depending where you are in cyberspace. A post on a friend’s Facebook page requires less formality than an e-mail to your teacher.

Try to be respectful of other people’s time. Keep your messages direct and concise.

Be mindful of the use of capital letters and offensive language. Using all capital letters can give the impression that you are shouting. Avoid offensive language or comments that attack the writer of the comment rather than his or her argument. Additionally, avoid personal attacks, called “flaming.” If you read a message that you suspect might be a personal attack, resist the temptation to fire off a response. Instead, let your response sit awhile before sending or request that your instructor resolve the situation.

Following netiquette is the first step to successfully communicating with your classmates and instructor online.

General Tips for Communicating Online

In order to help you consider how online communication should occur in the classroom keep in mind the three P’s: Be prompt, polite, and professional.

Remember to speak up. If you have a question or concern, ask. Look for a FAQ discussion board to ask questions about readings and assignments.

Participate! The most successful students log on regularly. Be sure to check Discussions, Course Mail, or announcements at least five days a week.

Read Carefully. Because an online course relies so much on written material, many students have difficulty resisting the impulse to merely skim discussion postings or announcements. Because this can lead to misunderstandings, read everything carefully.

Use Emoticons to add expressions and emotion to your communication. They can help you take the place of your nonverbal communication that is missing in the online environment.

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Finally, be clear and concise. In most online courses, it is essential for students to participate meaningfully and thoughtfully. The quality of the comment is more important than the quantity.

In addition to these general guidelines you will also want to keep in mind some key tips for communicating in the two most common communication channels used in online classroom: Discussion forums or boards and email.

Tips for Discussion Forums

First, most faculty ask students to contribute to classroom discussion using the discussion forums in the learning management system. Remember to read the discussion prompt carefully. You may be asked to post an initial post and then respond to other students. Additionally, the instructor may require a specific length or quality of discussion. Keep in mind most discussion forums are graded and count as classroom participation.

I strongly suggest you compose your answer in Word and then cut and paste into discussion board. That way you will have a copy in case something goes wrong with the technology. Also be sure to spell check and re-read your posting before you upload it.

While discussion boards should include proper use of grammar and spelling that doesn't mean that you can't share personal experiences and be a bit more informal. Personal experiences are great ways to provide examples and demonstrate that you can relate course concepts to your everyday experiences. Some instructors may ask for examples as part of a prompt but you can provide them to enrich any answer at any time.

The key is to write meaningful responses. When communicating in discussions, you might be tempted to respond to a message with "Okay" or "I agree." These responses add little to the conversation. Your instructor might also have a list of "discussion forum guidelines" that set expectations regarding the length and content for your messages.

You can also refer to the course readings. Be sure to use quotes when using direct language from reading to avoid issues of plagiarism. Plagiarism is when you present another person's words as if they are your own. If you are using direct quotes you should indicate the author's name, year of the text for the material, and use the quotes around the content that directly comes from the source.

Sometimes discussions online can become a battle of perspectives. Avoid the tendency to "prove" your view is the only right view. Keep in mind that students in your online class may come from different geographic areas of the United States and represent multiple cultures. Additionally, you may have International students in your class who have vast cultural differences. Try to focus on finding similarities such as your shared degree program or interests to make connections.

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Finally, always check to make sure that your post was submitted. After you submit, surf out of discussion board and back in to make sure your post is there. Sometimes technology doesn't work correctly!

Tips for E-mail:

In addition to discussion boards, the other common communication tool you will use is e-mail.

First, provide a clear subject line which includes your name, class, and section number. Also remember to update your subject line in responses if you are changing the focus of the communication.

Be direct and to the point in your email exchanges. You can accomplish this by keeping paragraphs brief and easy to read.

Remember to spell check and re-read your message before you press send. Keep in mind if you are upset about the topic of the email to wait until you have calmed down to re-read the message and then send. It is easy to create additional unwanted conflict because you send off a quick email when you are upset.

Be sure to always have a clear signature line with full name, email, and class information. Most faculty teach more than one class and providing this information will make it easier for faculty members to respond to your questions and concerns.

Finally, be patient-- don't expect an immediate response. Most faculty will explain the timeline for response to a question. In general, most faculty indicate that they may take up to 24 hours to respond. Firing off a series of questions about an assignment due within the next hour and expecting a response is just unrealistic. Remember to check FAQ discussion boards; the syllabus; and assignment because many times you have the answer you may have just missed it when you glanced over these materials. Having realistic expectations of faculty response will make your online learning experience less frustrating.

Conclusion:

Communicating online presents its own challenges but as this review indicates there are some easy tips that you can follow to ensure that you present yourself professionally and appropriately in the online classroom.