Netiquette guidance – Expectations and ways to behave in digital circles

Background information

It cannot be assumed that students automatically know how to communicate in an online environment and instances occur where misunderstandings and misinformation can lead to negative experiences for those users of the digital circle.

Due to this, research shows that a set of rules or guidance in relation to how to behave online may benefit those within the circle. A term that has been coined is ‘netiquette – ‘[it] is network etiquette, the do’s, and don’ts of online communication. Netiquette covers both common courtesies online and the informal ‘rules of the road’ of cyberspace.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The term encourages ‘digital citizens’ to consider how they behave in digital environments, because each digital circle will have its own social and cultural norms, contexts (informal/formal), purpose (what its for) and people (known/unknown to the user)[[2]](#footnote-2).

The aim of netiquette guidance is to enable a positive, engaging, and constructive environment. It enables students to feel safe, respected and connected within the digital circle. Equally in the absence of visual and auditory cues, it reduces the chance of misunderstandings and misinterpretations of messages.

Fundamental netiquette rules in digital circles

In the first instance of setting up a digital circle, the guidance shared with members should adhere to your university’s or institution’s Code of Conduct or Behaviour policy. The expectations for how members behave in an online group should be no different to the expectations of in-person lectures and communications. This resource is intended for use alongside said codes or policies, as it offers some key expectations and behaviours that apply to digital experiences specifically.

Non-compliance of the expectations outlined could cause disrespect to others[[3]](#footnote-3) and disciplinary action may need to take place, following your university’s or institution’s process. **Students need to be made aware who they can speak to**, should they experience unacceptable behaviour, and this should be included within the guidance.

Although this guidance aims to encompass all relevant and appropriate expectations (no matter the platform used or intended audience) it is at the digital circle’s creator discretion whether they deem all or some of the suggestions appropriate for use. **It is suggested that feedback is sought from the digital circle’s members to encourage inclusivity also.**

Below are a set of prompt questions to aid discussions about the set-up of your digital circle and to promote good practice within it.

Practice 1: Consider your choice of language

1. What is the role of banter, humour, or sarcasm?
2. Will the circle use formal or informal language (will emoticons, abbreviations, curse words be allowed)?
3. Are there topics that will not be discussed?
4. What would be classed as inappropriate language?
5. What steps would be taken if inappropriate language was used?
6. How will members be addressed within the digital circle - will they be asked to share their names and what module/course/specialist interest group they belong to?

Practice 2: Behave responsibly

1. Will members need to ask permission to share personal information from the digital circle?
2. Can the circle’s moderator remove participants if they are not behaving responsibly?
3. What steps would be taken if a disclosure was made by a member?
4. What support would be in place if a member displayed signs of a breakdown or troubling mental health issues?

Practice 3: Consider your environment

1. Will the purpose and level of participation of the digital circle be shared with members?
2. Will links/postings/messages be restricted to course/specialist interest group related materials only?
3. What will happen to members of the digital circle who are no longer part of the university course/module/specialist interest group?
4. Will different platforms (Teams, Instagram, Facebook and so on) require different guidance and practices?

Practice 4: Respect others time and differences

1. Will there be a time of day when messages aren’t permitted to be sent (to provide a break from messages)?
2. Will students be made aware that no response does not mean they have been ignored?
3. Is it okay to mute the group?
4. Are all members expected to engage with the group?
5. How will instances of “flaming” (replying angrily without taking a step back) be prevented?
6. What steps would be taken if racism, sexism or other forms of bullying and harassment occurred?

Practice 5: Support each other’s’ growth and development

1. Can members be their “whole selves” in this circle?
2. How will trust and a sense of community be created in the digital circle?
3. Will it be a space where members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings?
4. Is it okay for members to share their marks, awards, and achievements?
5. How will feedback on how the digital circle is run, be collected?

Practice 6: Be understanding

1. What steps will be taken to make the circle accessible for members who have disabilities?
2. Should comments about certain individuals be shared in the digital circle or sent in a separate direct message to that person?

Emoticons and Abbreviations

Below are examples of commonly used emoticons and abbreviations that can be seen in digital circles. Consider creating your own list based on the digital circle’s audience.[[4]](#footnote-4)

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| Emoticons | Meanings |
| :-) or : ) | = smiley, laugh, have a nice day |
| :-( or : ( | = frowning, sad |
| :-\* or : \* | = kiss |
| ;-) or ; ) | = winking or sly joke |
| :-D | = laughing or big grin |
| :-0 | = yelling or screaming, surprised, or completely shocked |
| %-) | = confused but happy |
| :-@ | = angry |
| :-/ or :-\ | = whatever, sarcasm |
| O\_o | = confused |
| <\_< or -\_- | = disappointed, ashamed, upset |
| :'-( or :'( | = crying |

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| --- | --- |
| Abbreviations (Shorthand) | Meanings |
| FYI | = for your information |
| ASAP | = as soon as possible |
| BTW | = by the way |
| LOL | = laugh out loud |
| WTG | = way to go |
| TTUL | = talk to you later |
| BFN | = bye for now |
| BRB | = be right back |
| CUL | = see you later |
| IDK | = I don’t know |
| JK, JJ | = just kidding, just joking |
| TYVM  Note: Unless using an abbreviation, avoid use of All CAPS, as you will appear to be shouting. | = thank you very much |

1. Shea, V. (1997). *Netiquette*. Albion books Retrieved from

   http://www.albion.com/netiquette/book/0963702513p59.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Preece, J. (2004) *Etiquette Online: From nice to necessary.* Communications of the ACM (accepted,

   in press) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Kozík, T., & Slivová, J. (2014). Netiquette in Electronic Communication. International Journal of Engineering Pedagogy (iJEP), 4(3), pp. 67–70. https://doi.org/10.3991/ijep.v4i3.3570 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (Adapted from: [Netiquette – Instruct­ional Resources (mun.ca)](https://blog.citl.mun.ca/instructionalresources/netiquette/)) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)