

Netiquette Guide

net·i·quette *noun*

1. the accepted manner of communicating on the Internet.

Today, we increasingly rely on digital technologies to interact with one another. We engage in discussions via social media, get assistance through chat boxes and email, and—increasingly—meet “face-to-face” in virtual environments like Zoom or Google Meet.

These new behavioral patterns necessitate new behavioral norms. Etiquette is what governs polite social interactions in the physical domain; netiquette—an emerging and still evolving concept—governs polite social interactions in the digital domain.

Below are a few common rules of netiquette that all of us should abide by when engaging with one another in a virtual space. The rules apply both in a synchronous environment—where participants interact face-to-face in real-time, such as in a Zoom meeting—or in an asynchronous environment—where participants do not interact in real-time, such as on discussion boards or on Facebook.

We encourage all patrons to review these basic principles.

Netiquette for Face-to-Face Virtual Meetings

- **Test your tech before you log on.** Computers break and Internet connections fail. That is why you should always test your tech prior to entering a virtual meeting space. Testing will afford the opportunity to find a work around or resolve an issue before it can cause a problem in your class. If you are hosting a virtual meeting, make sure you have a backup plan, either in the form of a different device (in the case of a hardware failure) or a different platform (in the event of a software failure).
- **Turn your camera on; always look directly into the camera when speaking.** Visual cues are important in physical interactions; they are equally important when we interact virtually. For this reason, you should keep your camera on whenever possible while participating in an online meeting. When speaking, always look directly into the camera.
- **Mute yourself when not speaking.** In a physical room, we all hear the same ambient noise. In a virtual environment, the ambient noise is the background soundtrack found in each and every physical place that each and every individual participant is occupying. This is exceedingly distracting for everyone in the virtual meeting, so remember to mute yourself when not speaking.
- **Choose your work environment carefully.** Remember, you are on camera. Avoid messy or distracting backgrounds. Never place your device below eye level and always ensure that there are no bright light sources—such as windows—directly behind you. If you plan on using a virtual background, make sure it is appropriate.
- **Dress appropriately.** Again, you are on camera. If you would refrain from wearing a certain outfit or article of clothing in public, do not wear that outfit or article of clothing when interacting with others online. The Internet is a public sphere where you can observe the actions of others, and where others can observe you; make sure to dress accordingly.
- **Use non-verbal communication tools.** Most virtual meeting platforms include tools for non-verbal communication, such as chat, feedback emojis, stop or slow down signs, and a raise-your-hand function. Use these tools to get the attention of the host or others in the meeting—they can be less obtrusive than simply unmuting yourself and interrupting.
- **Do not record without express permission.** The right to privacy does not end where cyberspace begins. Recording a meeting or virtual interaction without express permission to

do so is a blatant violation of privacy. Always inform meeting participants that you will be recording if you are the meeting host. If you are a participant, never record without the express permission of the host and other participants. This applies equally to recording using an external device—holding your mobile phone up to your screen and recording is dishonest behavior.

- **Do not post recordings without express permission.** Recordings can live forever on the Internet. They can also be manipulated or taken out of context, and have the potential to negatively impact a participant's life or livelihood. If you plan on posting a recording on Youtube or other forms of social media, ask permission first.
- **Maintain civility in the chat.** Just because the chat is a text-based space does not mean the rules of netiquette are suspended. Remember, chat is a part of the Internet's public sphere—what you say here is visible to others. Always follow this simple rule: if you would not say it out loud or to someone's face, do not type it into chat. You should also not take for granted that "private" chats are always private; there is always a way for others to see them.

Netiquette for Social Media

- **Maintain civility.** Just because a social media post takes on a text-based or recorded form does not mean the rules of netiquette are suspended. Remember, any communication is a part of the Internet's public sphere—what you say here is visible to others. Always follow this simple rule: if you would not say it out loud or to someone's face, do not post it on social media.
- **Write clearly and with a purpose.** Effective written communication is essential. Since the individuals you are interacting with through social media generally cannot see your facial expressions and therefore cannot see or hear your intent, you must weigh your choice of words and phrases carefully. Remember, in an asynchronous environment, the written word acts as your surrogate. If you would not represent yourself in-person in a certain manner, make sure you are not representing yourself that way on social media
- **Proofread or listen before you post; think critically about what you're saying.** Again, effective written or oral communication is essential. Perform a spell check, make sure there are no grammatical errors, and take a moment to once again confirm that what you've written conveys your intent. If you are posting a recording, listen to it once or twice before hitting the post button. Is your voice clear? Are there distracting noises in the background? Does your recording convey the ideas you meant to impart? If not, you might want to think about re-recording.
- **When writing, avoid ALL CAPS.** Using all capital letters implies a shout or aggressive tone—in order to maintain civility, all caps are best avoided.