

# FGSR Professional Development Professional Practice Module



## Netiquette

Did you know that the internet is estimated to handle over 35 billion e-mails in one day?

There is no doubt that the internet has transformed our modes of communication from pen and paper to the modern computer. While this change is significant, what remains is the human factor: the fact that behind the technology of computers are people like you.

Because people remain the driving force of computer-based communication, there remains the expectation that rules and conventions which govern interpersonal relations also apply to computer mediated interactions such as email, chat rooms and web boards.

The rules, conventions and ethics for communicating with others on the internet are called internet etiquette or "Netiquette:" (Net + etiquette).

Goldberg (2007 In Anderson-Draper, 2007) defines netiquette as those manners that are really just the application of old manners in a new setting.

Netiquette calls for treating others as you would like to be treated: "the golden rule" or the rule of reciprocity. It also calls for the exercise of freedom in tandem with responsibility and accountability for everything that you post on the internet both under your actual name or otherwise.

### A Brief Netiquette Dictionary:

- AFK: Away from keyboard
- ATM: At the moment
- B4N / BFN: Bye for now
- BBL: Be back later
- BCC: Blind carbon copy to. (Copy of email is sent to a recipient or recipients that remain undisclosed to other recipient(s))
- BRB: Be right back
- BTK: Back to keyboard
- Cc: Carbon copy email to...
- Emoticons: Icons made up of combinations of keyboard strokes or pre-designed mini-graphics such as facial expressions which are used to display emotions while communicating on the internet.
- FWD: Forward email to...
- IMO: In my opinion
- IRL: In real life
- LOL: Laugh out loud
- ORLY: Oh really?
- SPAM: To send (a message) indiscriminately to multiple mailing lists, individuals, or newsgroups
- TY: Thank you

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## Tips: General Rules of Netiquette

Although netiquette may be divided into different internet mediums such as email, web boards etc, as done below, it is important to be familiar with as many rules of netiquette as possible because they tend to overlap in significant ways.

- Avoid USING ALL CAPS. It comes off as yelling and is not easy on the eyes
- Keep your message as brief as possible.
- Use relevant, meaningful and brief subject lines.
- Use plain text (as opposed to HTML) to send messages except otherwise requested.
- Watch your humour. What you might find very funny might irritate or annoy someone else.
- Use emoticons, for example happy faces, when you want to indicate that you are not serious. Note however that because emoticons may not translate well in email format, it is better to reserve their use for informal or casual communication online.
- Use your discretion to minimize the posting of personal information online. For example, photos, Resumes and CVs, contact information and so on. Keep in mind that information posted online is accessible to millions of persons most of whom you do not know.

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## Tips: Email Etiquette

- Email is not a substitute for personal contact. Avoid using email to resolve personal or professional arguments, or for breaking bad news.
- Avoid forwarding chain emails like hoaxes and jokes to everyone in your address book. It is important to use your discretion to choose those recipients who are okay with such messages.
- Avoid sending attachments to everyone on your mailing list. Use your discretion to choose those recipients that might be okay with such attachments.
- Use subject lines that would briefly summarize for the recipient, the content of your email. Proper subjects also help the recipient to prioritize the viewing of their mail.
- Do not carbon copy emails to everybody but only those people who are directly or at least indirectly linked to the content of the email.
- If you have a long list of people to whom you are sending information, consider using Bcc so that people do not have a lengthy list of emails they need to scroll through to get to the message. This way you also avoid other people gaining email address information without consent.
- If you receive what appears to be a rumor, avoid forwarding it to someone else.
- Always include your contact information especially in the case of formal emails. Your contact information may include your employer/company name, postal address, phone number and so on. This way, you provide options to people who wish to speak to you about matters too sensitive for email or are unable to reach you by email.
- Pre-writing skills are important for composing professional emails. Questions to ponder before writing an email include:
  - What is the purpose of my message? A specific answer to this question will help to keep your message brief and clear.

- What do I hope to achieve through this message? A clear purpose will help to organize and direct the writing of your message. It will also help you make a conscious effort at using respectful and diplomatic phrases.
  - Who is my audience and how do I address them? This will help you to adhere to protocol
  - What reaction do I expect from my audience? Gauging the response of your audience will allow you to adjust your message according to the response you want.
  - Writing skills are also important for composing professional emails. Things to do include:
    - Compose your email offline. This way you avoid sending an incomplete message in error.
    - Double check recipient addresses. Look for errors and delete recipients that do not need to get the message.
    - Try to insert attachment first. This will save you the time of having to return to resend the message.
    - Use “reply all” only if everyone needs to get your message.
    - Take your time when writing.
    - If the content of your work is confidential, feel free to add a disclaimer. A disclaimer is a statement in which you assert your claim to the content of the email and disclaim ownership (of the same content) to any persons that receive the email in error. Recipients who receive emails in error are asked to (and this is often stated in disclaimers) either delete the email immediately or report the error to the sender or both. Most employers have a standard disclaimer that may be used by employees.
    - Spell check and proof read before hitting “Send.”
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## Activities to Do On Your Own

Take the following Netiquette quiz:

- **Question 1: The Angry Email**

One of your acquaintances just sent you an email concerning your absence at last week’s Game Night. He reckons that your excuse was weak, it came too late and your absence cost his (and your) team victory. You know he is angry because his email is entirely in CAPs and he uses different emoticons that display disgust, anger and disappointment. As you read the email you also get angry. How dare he send such an e-mail after you gave sufficient notice and subsequently apologized a number of times? You decide to respond. How would you proceed?

  - A) Respond in all CAPs to express your anger and use various emoticons to express your disappointment in him.
  - B) Respond with regular lettering explaining why you could not attend and you apologize yet again for the inconvenience and loss of victory.
  - C) Respond with regular lettering indicating that you would like to speak with him either in person or by phone as take his comments seriously and believe a telephone or face-to-face conversation would provide an opportunity to discuss the activity.
  - D) Ignore the mail for a couple of hours in an attempt to let your anger subside. You return to write a response in regular lettering re-explaining your excuse; and you suggest a face-to-face meeting to peaceably resolve the situation.

- **Question 2: The Professional Email**

You arrive at work and notice that you have received an email that was sent to 25 other employees. The email is from the General Manager who has lost her copy of a crucial file. She has emailed everyone in the hope that everyone will send their own copy from which she could select the most updated. You have your own copy which was last updated the day before at 5:20pm. How would you respond to this email?

- A) Hit “reply all,” but address your General Manager directly. Then announce that you have attached your copy of the document. You also indicate that it was last updated yesterday at 5:20pm
- B) Hit “reply all” and address everyone directly. Then announce that you have attached a copy of the document. You also indicate that it was last updated yesterday at 5:20pm.
- C) Hit “reply” and address only the General Manager. You tell her that you have attached a copy of the document. You also indicate that it was last updated at 5:20pm.
- D) You wait until someone else responds with information on how recent their copy is. This will help you to decide if yours is more recent (or not) and consequently if it is worth it to send your email (or not).

- **Question 3: The Teaching Assistant and the Web Board**

You are the Teaching Assistant for Gender Studies 100 in which students are required to post their opinions weekly on an online discussion forum. One of your students started a new topic on the web board titled “Why women are smarter than men.” Under that topic, she lists ten reasons why she believes women are smarter than men. Soon enough tens of responses flood in showing a trend of an increasingly heated debate. In fact the last three messages have vulgar emoticons. Given that you cannot shut down the web board, what course of action would you take? You may choose more than one.

- A) Write a warning message in ALL CAPS to express anger and disappointment and to announce that you hereby put an end to all responses related to that topic.
- B) Write a response in regular letters which you develop your own argument in favour or against the topic.
- C) Write a response in regular letters in which you express disappointment; you put an end to the particular discussion and state your reason why.
- D) Speak to the students as a class (face-to-face) about netiquette and allow students to change their behavior on the web boards.

### Answers

- Question 1: Any of A, B or C is appropriate. However the most comprehensive response based on the earlier discussed rules of email netiquette would be D. With the response at D, anger is controlled because time is allowed to lapse before a response is composed. By responding to the email in regular lettering and also suggesting a face to face meeting there is some indication that you do not harbor ill feelings against your acquaintance. The steps in this response are all necessary for building peace out of what was becoming a ballooning conflict. These steps also propagate mutual respect as it mitigates the reproduction of anger.
- Question 2: A is the most appropriate response. You address the GM directly because the issue at hand particularly concerns her. Yet by hitting “reply all” you also include all others who are also indirectly related to the issue at hand. By hitting “reply all” you also let others know how recent your document is. This will also help them to know if they need to send their own copies – hence you help others to prioritize their work and be more efficient. You announce your attachment and indicate when it was last updated which constitutes part of a full response to the original question.
- Question 3: Either one of C or D is appropriate. However the optimum response is a two-pronged approach consisting of both responses. Writing in regular print is always better than writing in all CAPs, which would not only come off as yelling, but would also render your response emotionally charged and consequently un-objective and unprofessional. Reminding users of a web board about the rules of netiquette is always a good idea for managing and preventing potential and actual e-conflict.