

Communicating On-Line Policy

The online communication tools in your qualifications enable you to discuss course related topics, to deepen your understanding of the course content and to get and give help to other students. The guidelines for how to communicate using online communication tools, including emails, online forums, live chat to name a few is called **Netiquette** (or internet etiquette).

Participating in online discussions takes some getting used to. The first few times you participate you may feel nervous about sharing your ideas publicly. The more you take part, the more comfortable you become using online communication tools and the more you will benefit from your participation.

General politeness

An online discussion, like a face-to-face discussion, is a personal exchange of information. It can however, take place over an extended period of time: one or two days, a week or over the duration of your course. This means you can either respond immediately to discussion points or take some time to respond more carefully. Ideas and impressions are written rather than spoken, so you don't have the advantage of body language to help you interpret meaning. It is therefore, important to:

- Be polite and avoid bad language
- Acknowledge people's contributions
- Respect other people's point of view
- Be non-judgmental and supportive
- Be aware of cultural differences
- Be careful with humour and sarcasm.

One way to overcome the fact that you can't 'see' the person you are talking to is to use 'Emoticons' to give a visual meaning to your written words. For example, a smiling face or laughter can be represented by the symbol :) or the acronym LOL (laugh out loud). Only use these if you feel comfortable with them and don't overuse them.

Basic online communication guidelines

Participation

You should make a regular commitment to log-on and check the discussion board so that you get to know your online community and become an active part of the class.

When you take part in an online discussion, your tutor gets a clearer picture of your understanding and level of interest.

In most, participation is compulsory and you will be assessed on your contributions.

Composing Messages

- Keep messages reasonably short to help people follow the discussion. If you have something longer to say, attach it to a short message as a separate document, but take care not to overload the system with excessive amounts of information.
- Use the subject line and make sure it is clear. People see it first and often use it to decide whether or not to read the message.
- Be careful to express yourself clearly.

- Keep to the subject of the discussion.
- Try to move the discussion forward rather than saying things that could end it.
- Speak from your own perspective. Don't be afraid to give your own ideas.
- If you quote, the rules of copyright and plagiarism apply here just as they do elsewhere. If you use someone else's ideas, cite them appropriately by using quotation marks and give the person credit ("As John stated in his post of 5th October").

Posting Messages

- Read all the contributions to avoid repeating something other people have already written.
- Proofread your message for grammar, punctuation, spelling and layout to make the meaning clear. Use the correct level of formality for online discussions: informal but polite.
- Check who you are replying to. If your reply is not valuable to the whole group, reply to the author only.
- Re-read your message. If you accidentally send the wrong message, you will need to contact the system administrator to have it erased.
- A discussion is public so don't write anything which discriminates on the basis of race, colour, nationality, age, marital status, sex, political affiliation, religion, disability or sexual preference, or which might be considered obscene, offensive, threatening or intimidating. This includes offensive text or pictures, for example, pornography, racism, sexism, obscenities, insults, sarcasm, defamatory statements, rumours, gossip about individuals or organisations. Such comments have no place in online communication where the general approach is supportive and collaborative. In extreme cases, people who persist in offensive or disruptive behaviour may lose access to the tool and may be charged with misconduct.
- Never publicly attack another member or post an emotionally charged contribution. This is considered "flaming" and is not acceptable.
- It is inappropriate to correct someone's mistakes in your posting to the group. If it is necessary to point out a mistake, use a private email.
- Only use capitals for specific purposes such as headings, otherwise it can seem like SHOUTING.

Any breach of the **Australian Institute of Flexible Learning Policy Guidelines** on electronic harassment may constitute misconduct or serious misconduct. Please contact your course co-ordinator or the RTO Manager to report electronic harassment.

Reference: <http://online.mq.edu.au/docs/qgneti.html>