



# Netiquette and Communication Tips

In 1994, Virginia Shea developed her *Core Rules of Netiquette*. These ten rules have stood the test of time and are considered the definitive guidelines of online etiquette. When you communicate in a virtual world, these rules apply.

## Rules of Netiquette

### Rule 1: Remember the human.

When communicating electronically, whether through email, instant message, discussion post, text, or some other method, practice the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Remember, your written words are read by real people, all deserving respectful communication. Before you press "send" or "submit," ask yourself, "Would I be okay with this if someone else had written it?"

### Rule 2: Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life.

While it can be argued that standards of behavior may be different in the virtual world, they certainly should

not be lower. You should do your best to act within the laws and ethical manners of society whenever you inhabit "cyberspace." Would you behave rudely to someone face-to-face? On most occasions, no. Neither should you behave that way in the virtual world.

### Rule 3: Know where you are in cyberspace.

"Netiquette varies from domain to domain" (Shea, 1994). Depending on where you are in the virtual world, the same written communication that may be acceptable in one area might be considered inappropriate in another. What you text to a friend may not be appropriate in an email to a classmate or colleague. Can you think of another example?

### Rule 4: Respect other people's time and bandwidth.

Electronic communication takes time: time to read and time in which to respond. Most people today lead busy lives, just as you do, and don't have time to read or respond to frivolous emails or discussion posts. As a virtual world communicator, it is your responsibility to make sure that the time spent reading your words isn't wasted. Make your written communication meaningful and to the point, without extraneous text or superfluous graphics or attachments that may take forever to download.

### Rule 5: Make yourself look good online.

One of the best things about the virtual world is the lack of judgment

associated with your physical appearance, sound of your voice, or the clothes you wear (unless you post a video of yourself singing Karaoke in a clown outfit.) You will, however, be judged by the quality of your writing, so keep the following tips in mind:

- Always check for spelling and grammar errors.
- Know what you're talking about and state it clearly.
- Be pleasant and polite.

### Rule 6: Share expert knowledge.

The Internet offers its users many benefits; one is the ease with which information can be shared or accessed and, in fact, this "information sharing" capability is one of the reasons the Internet was founded. So in the spirit of the Internet's "founding fathers," share what you know! When you post a question and receive intelligent answers, share the results with others. Are you an expert at something? Post resources and references about your subject matter. Recently expanded your knowledge about a subject that might be of interest to others? Share that as well.

### Rule 7: Help keep flame wars under control.

What is meant by "flaming" and "flame wars?" "Flaming is what

people do when they express a strongly held opinion without holding back any emotion" (Shea, 1994). As an example, think of the kinds of passionate comments you might read on a sports blog. Although "flaming" is not necessarily forbidden in virtual communication, "flame wars"--when two or three people exchange angry posts between one another--must be controlled or the camaraderie of the group could be compromised. Don't feed the flames; extinguish them by guiding the discussion back to a more productive direction.

### Rule 8: Respect other people's privacy.

Depending on what you are reading in the virtual world, be it an online class discussion forum, Facebook page, or an email, you may be exposed to some private or personal information that needs to be handled with care. Perhaps someone is sharing some medical news about a loved one or discussing a situation at work. What do you think would happen if this information "got into the wrong hands?" Embarrassment? Hurt feelings? Loss of a job? Just as you expect others to respect your privacy, so should you respect the privacy of others. Be sure to err on the side of caution when deciding to discuss or

not to discuss virtual communication.

### Rule 9: Don't abuse your power.

Just as in face-to-face situations, there are people in cyberspace who have more "power" than others. They have more expertise in technology, or they have years of experience in a particular skill or subject matter. Maybe it's you who possesses all of this knowledge and power! Just remember: knowing more than others do or having more power than others may have does not give you the right to take advantage of anyone. Think of Rule 1: Remember the human.

### Rule 10: Be forgiving of other people's mistakes.

Not everyone has the same amount of experience working in the virtual world. And not everyone knows the rules of netiquette. At some point, you will see a stupid question, read an unnecessarily long response, or encounter misspelled words; when this happens, practice kindness and forgiveness as you would hope someone would do if you had committed the same offense. If it's a minor "offense," you might want to let it slide. If you feel compelled to respond to a mistake, do so in a private email rather than a public forum.

## Attention to Details

### Consider perception.

Your communication can reflect positively or negatively on you. Avoiding mistakes by following simple rules will help lead to professional results and avoid embarrassing situations. Building on the ten rules above, the suggestions below provide more details. You should be mindful of your netiquette when writing emails, posting on discussion forums, commenting on Facebook or Twitter, or posting

photos. Netiquette governs every aspect of your internet experience.

### Attend to spelling and grammar.

Always use proper grammar and correct spelling. Poor grammar and misspelled words are unprofessional and reflect poorly on you and your message. A suggestion is to type your message or information into a word processor such as MS Word, apply the spell and grammar checker, make

changes, then copy and paste the text to your communication source. Take

the time to ensure your audience does not have to read a poorly written message with typos.

### Adopt the "you" attitude.

When communicating within the DKG world, avoid using "me" or "I" with your message. Your messages should be about the reader or the organization and not the writer. Talk

about the other person and use the word "you" and "your" in your message. There are exceptions to this rule, such as in online classrooms and websites; however, professional writing requires the "you" attitude at all times while sending emails, memos, and letters.

### Write concisely.

Get to the point. Follow the concept of concise writing and do not ramble on with unnecessary words. Only write what is necessary so your audience can quickly read your message and move on. People have many other emails and websites to read, and if you write senseless words leading to a long email or electronic message, people might click out early and move on to their next reading.

### Proofread.

Always proofread your message! You do not have the opportunity to use body language while communicating over the Internet, and people may misinterpret your message if you do not write with good tone. Do not write messages that are confrontational, rude, or all caps (**WHICH MEANS YOU ARE SHOUTING!**). A good suggestion is to read aloud your message to ensure it is a polite and courteous communication for your audience.

### Use good tone.

Good tone is critical with electronic writing. The wrong words can leave a bad impression and upset the reader--especially with emails and in online classrooms. It is easy to sound bossy and unprofessional with persuasive messages, and because most situations are asynchronous, you do not have the opportunity to respond immediately or allow the audience to see body language or hear the tone of your voice. Always check your writing to ensure it is polite and neutral regarding requests and conveying

information. An email with good tone can accomplish much more than one that is overbearing and with the "me" attitude. Remember, the "you" attitude is a good way to convey your messages with good tone.

### Double check email address.

With email programs, it is easy to send a message to the wrong email address. Your unkind remarks may get to the wrong person. Before clicking the send button, always check the email address of the recipient. In a similar vein, do not "Reply to All" unless it is absolutely necessary.

### Extend email courtesies.

'Blind carbon copy' is a way of sending emails to multiple people without divulging recipients' email addresses. Any emails in the "bcc" field will be invisible to everyone else in the "to" and "cc" fields. Using "bcc" maintains privacy of email addresses, but it should only be used when it isn't a personal email. Keep in mind that it is deceitful to lead someone to believe they are the only one receiving an email when they actually aren't. Also, remember that if the person you bcc'd presses the 'reply all' button, everyone else will know that you secretly added them to the email chain.

When you receive an email from someone in DKG, common courtesy suggests that you reply with at least a "Thank you" or "Got it." You don't have to write volumes, but a brief reply lets the writer know that the email was received. This courtesy alone would eliminate a multitude of questions and worry that emails are not being delivered.

### Keep file sizes small.

People do not want to wait for long downloads. Even with today's high-speed connections, large file sizes are annoying and will cause the person downloading the message to abort. If

you know your file size is large, be sure to convert the file to a PDF format prior to attaching the file. Always convert long documents, large graphics, and pictures to PDF format to ensure the file size is reasonable and downloads quickly--especially for those who do not have fast connection speeds. If you do not want to convert pictures to PDF, optimize them using Photoshop or another image program.

### Internet messages are permanent.

Make sure everything your post on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) is appropriate. Your rude remarks live forever. Be careful what you write! Sometimes it is best to keep thoughts to yourself because the Internet is a permanent record of what you send. You cannot retract or delete messages or posts (in most cases), so if you do not want your message read by the wrong people, you probably should communicate your message using another media and avoid sending it electronically. Anyone--from your grandmother to a colleague to a boss--can see what you post.

### Be respectful.

Respond to other people's messages promptly, and if they ask for a return acknowledgment or receipt of an email, give it to them! Be polite, friendly, and professional at all times. Many of these rules imply respect for the reader; the Internet is a permanent message and reflects on you as a person. Use these rules to your advantage by thinking about your message and who reads it. The Internet can be a great tool for building a good reputation and respect from your peers.

### Be professional at all times.

Avoid getting into arguments in chat rooms, online classrooms, or with emails. This happens often and is a

result of the ease of sending a message while upset or out of spite or revenge. Because the other person is not present, people often use the power of electronic writing to vent or lash out at each other. If you become upset at a person, do not respond electronically until you have had time to put the issue into perspective.

Remember, electronic messages are permanent. Do not put yourself in a position with an unprofessional message you may regret later. It may come back to haunt you!

Follow rules for email.

Use clear and precise subjects. Utilize formal letter-writing formats. Keep your messages concise. Include your name and contact information in all communication. NEVER give out any personal information via email.



## Summary

The number one reason people go to the internet is to read. Therefore, following simple rules for electronic writing is critical to a well-received message. You can make a positive or negative impression on those who read your electronic communication. The choice is yours. While

communicating electronically, people often never meet each other in person, and this may be the only way you are perceived. Use good writing skills and follow these rules to make a lasting positive impression, and you will gain respect and people will look forward to reading your messages.

And remember, it is just as easy to create a poor impression if you do not follow rules, so take the time to communicate effectively over the Internet. You will be glad you did later!



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Netiquette rules adapted from [The Core Rules of Netiquette](#): Shea, V. (1994). Core rules of netiquette. *Netiquette* (Online ed., pp. 32-45). San Francisco: Albion Books.

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