“Netiquette” for Online Courses

1. What is “netiquette”
“Netiquette” refers to online etiquette, or etiquette on the “net.” Just as we all try to be polite and respectful to one another in-person, we all hope to do the same online. However, due to the distance and technology involved in online courses, all of us are sometimes tempted to say and do things online that we would never say or do in-person. Reviewing some basics of netiquette helps us to minimize this problem.

2. The Golden Rule of Netiquette
Do unto others on the internet as you would have others do unto you on the internet. All other rules of netiquette follow from this one.

3. Remember the Human
Remember that everyone you talk to online is a human being somewhere, with myriad virtues among their flaws. Try to get to know your colleagues, give them the benefit of the doubt, and ask yourself once in a while what you really like about the people you’re speaking with online. Seek to be patient with others when they make a mistake, or even seem to be violating the rules of netiquette themselves. Participate in social forums to get to know each other.

4. Avoid slang, abbreviation, etc, but try some emojis
In many course forums, it is perfectly fine to be informal with respect to what you are saying. However, avoid jargon and net-speak; instead, just type out what you want to say in full.

That said, feel free to use emojis and emoticons appropriately in your forum posts. These can help make clear the tone of a particular post, how committed a contributor is to his or her viewpoint, and when something should be taken lightly or humorously. Pretty helpful, right? ;-)

5. Don’t shout
Thankfully, this is less of a problem than it once was. Still, it’s always good to remember not to use ALL CAPS in a web forum. If you need to emphasize something, find a way to do it with your prose whenever possible.

6. Proof-read your comments
Proof for grammar and spelling, but also for content and tone. Is the message clear and polite? Have you made your point as clearly as you can? Can you think of any ways that your post might be misread or misunderstood and correct it before even posting? Would an emoji help, or do you have too many already?

7. Accept diversity in views and learn from it
Course forums are for sharing insights and learning from each other, they are not about winning arguments or even being right. Of course, you should express your own views, provide evidence for them, and try to make a good case for what you’re saying. But don’t get too frustrated if others still don’t agree after you’ve done so.

8. Avoid sarcasm
A little dose of sarcasm can be quite welcome and perfectly polite in face-to-face conversations. Online, however, sarcasm should be almost universally avoided. Without tone of voice and body language, people will tend to assume that you mean just what you are saying; sarcasm can create tension and misunderstanding.

9. Avoid second-person pronouns when disagreeing
When disagreeing in a forum, we must be exceptionally careful to focus on the ideas that we are discussing, rather than the people with whom we are talking. When you want to disagree with an idea in the forum, see if you can write your entire post without saying “you” even once. (This is less important when agreeing with someone else).

10. Check in with your emotions, especially when disagreeing
Disagreement is a healthy part of any academic conversation, but when interacting online our emotions can ramp up much more quickly than in person.

As you participate in an online conversation, think about how you’re feeling while writing. If you find yourself feeling upset by something, consider the following.

* Delay making any response post until you’re feeling settled again.
* When posting to disagree, review the post at least twice before sending.
* If something’s really eating you, contact your instructor privately to talk about the issue. If another student’s behaviour is out of line, the instructor can take some action to address the problem. If not, he or she can help you feel heard and less isolated about the conversation or disagreement.

11. Respect everyone’s time
Be succinct. We’re all very busy.