



## Engaging in Online Communication: a student guide

Communicating in an online world requires etiquette – that is, a code of conduct for polite, professional behaviour – in order to ensure successful, meaningful interactions. When dealing with etiquette in an online world, we tend to call it ‘netiquette’.

Netiquette is a code of behaviour for how we interact with each other in all of our online environments. At the University of Glasgow, we primarily use Moodle, email, Zoom and Microsoft Teams for our online communications; the guide below, however, applies to **all** forms of online communication.

### Communication at Glasgow

Remember that all your communications as a student – no matter the platform or the audience – count as professional communication. You should treat **all** your online interactions as professional in nature. In practice this means:

- ⇒ Be respectful in tone, content and manner when communicating with others
  - While we may be used to communicating online, remember that University communication is not casual, informal or social communication: maintain a professional tone at all points
- ⇒ Give others time and space to communicate effectively
  - For email and forum communications, this will involve acknowledging acceptable response times; for synchronous teaching, it will involve allowing all members of the group time and opportunity to contribute to group discussions
- ⇒ Acknowledge and recognise the viewpoints, contributions and interpretations of others, and be respectful of alternative views
- ⇒ Think before you type or speak
  - Online communications – in any format – can be easily misread or misinterpreted, so give consideration to what you are saying and how you are saying it
- ⇒ Provide necessary information in the first communication
  - Use your University email account; provide your GUID; provide your course information
- ⇒ Read before you write
  - Ensure that you have tried to find your own answers (i.e. from course handbooks, from other emails, from course information, from course Moodle sites, from the University website) before writing an email to ask a question
  - Ensure that you have read and are up to date on course communications and forum posts before writing a question or a response

## Asynchronous communication: emails and forums

Asynchronous communication is communication (like email and forum posts) that are not immediate; in other words, they are messages sent where the sender and the receiver are not (usually) communicating back and forth at the same time. This form of communication requires more attention to detail and to tone than face-to-face interactions. As your body language cannot be read, you as the author have to be more careful to clearly articulate your thoughts.

- ⇒ Provide a salutation ('Dear Professor X'), include overt use of thanks where appropriate, and sign off your email in a professional manner ('Best regards' or simply 'thanks' can work well)
- ⇒ Try to use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling, and try to adopt a formal tone in your writing, but forgive others for their mistakes. Email and forum posts can be written in haste, but maintaining a clarity of grammar and structure will make it easier for your reader to understand your intention
- ⇒ Avoid using CAPITALS as this implies anger or shouting
- ⇒ Be careful of sarcasm and attempts at humour: without your body language, it can be hard to pick out sarcasm and humour is not universal. If in doubt, avoid altogether
- ⇒ Use meaningful and descriptive subject lines/forum headings

### Emails

- ⇒ Use your University email account
- ⇒ Include all the information necessary for the receiver to be able to understand and act on your request (this would commonly involve including your GUID and your course details, as well as the specifics of what you are looking for from the communication)
- ⇒ Be careful of the distinction between 'Reply' and 'Reply All'
  - Are you sure that all the people in a 'reply all' email need to be contacted?
- ⇒ Be careful of forwarding communications
  - Are you sure that you have permission from the original sender to forward the communication?
- ⇒ Don't spam or send repeated emails. Staff at the University receive significant volumes of emails, and it can sometimes take a while for them to reply. Be respectful of the workloads of staff
  - Similarly, provide staff – and other students – with enough time to respond. Emailing out of usual business hours or last minute will put additional pressure on staff and on you
- ⇒ Proof-read your emails before you hit the send button

## Synchronous communication: Zoom and Teams

Synchronous online communication more closely resembles face-to-face communication; two or more people are involved in a 'live' discussion. This can be via instant message platforms (such as Teams) or live sessions including webcams and microphones (such as a Zoom or Teams class).

If involved in an instant message communication (discussion in Teams or using the chat function on Zoom, for example), keep in mind many of the rules from asynchronous communication: be respectful of others in the discussion and pay attention to others' contributions; avoid using CAPITALS or sarcasm; and don't spam or flood the chat with messages.

Think of it this way: instant message communication should replicate how you would interact in the real world.

- ⇒ Provide space for others to contribute
- ⇒ Posting simply 'I agree' or 'I disagree' isn't helpful. Explain and extrapolate
- ⇒ Be forgiving of others' mistakes
- ⇒ Use emoticons and gifs (where appropriate) to clearly communicate your thoughts and intentions
- ⇒ Remember: if you wouldn't say it to someone in a face-to-face setting, then don't say it to them via instant message

## Live Sessions

For live sessions – that is, Teams calls or Zoom classrooms that involve the use of webcams and/or microphones – you should adopt many of the practices of face-to-face classroom etiquette. Adapting to communicating in this format can take a little time and practice, but remember:

- ⇒ Include your name as your Zoom identity; it makes it easier for everyone to address you correctly
- ⇒ Mute your microphone unless you're contributing to the discussion
  - Background noise can be very distracting and can interrupt the speaker, and can cause loud echoes over the call
  - Remember to unmute yourself before you begin to talk
- ⇒ If using your camera, be aware of what's in your background
  - On some computers, you can blur your background in Teams or you can use a chosen background image on Zoom if you do not want to share your background

## Synchronous communication: Zoom and Teams (cont.)

### Live Sessions

- ⇒ If you want to speak, try raising your hand (or using the 'raise hand' feature in Zoom). Some staff will have different views on how to contribute in an online class (using the chat function, raising your hand, using the 'raise hand' feature). Follow their guidelines and remember:
- It's normal for multiple people to try to talk at once in a Zoom meeting (resulting in the 'oh, no – you first!' response). This happens all the time, and is a normal part of Zoom/Teams interaction. Take your turn to talk, and give others space to talk, too
  - Try not to interrupt people while they are in the middle of talking, however
- ⇒ Remember that you can also use the instant messaging features on Zoom/Teams to communicate
- ⇒ When talking, try to look at the camera (instead of the faces on the screen)
- This is difficult to get used to, but it will mimic the real-life situation of making eye contact
  - Zoom allows you to turn off your view of yourself, so you can hide your own image from your view if you prefer
- ⇒ Remember to be respectful of others' contributions, and remember that communicating in an online environment can be a strange adaptation for many of us

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