

## Suggestions for Communicating Online

The Internet offers students several convenient methods for communicating with instructors and peers outside of the classroom. In addition to sending and receiving private messages via e-mail, students can exchange ideas and opinions in open forums using real-time messaging (*chat areas*) or delayed messaging (*discussion boards*). The quality of these exchanges can vary greatly depending on the experience of the participants.



If you are new to the Internet or inexperienced in on-line communication, you need to become aware of the social rules that have evolved to guide interactions among travelers on the Information Superhighway. These simple rules of "netiquette", are summarized below. By observing them, you can make your on-line discussions more productive and enjoyable.

### **Rule No. 1: Read your messages completely.**

Don't respond to an e-mail message or posting until you've read it entirely. Many people think as they write, so explanations, conclusions and recommendations often end up in the last paragraph.

### **Rule No. 2: Make yourself perfectly clear.**

When responding to a message, make your references clear. If you're replying to a previous posting, be sure to quote or paraphrase what you're responding to and who said it. Reason: Several postings may occur between the original message and your reply. Without the proper context, the original sender may have no idea what you're talking about.

In response to Bea Wright's comment of 12/2:

> The Smith & Jones book was excellent, the best ever written for advanced clinicians.

Bea, I agree with you that Smith and Jones provides a good overview of the clinician's role in today's health care system, but I think the authors miss the mark in terms of where the profession is going.

By the way, it also helps to include an accurate Subject: statement in your header. If you don't have a clear subject statement or your subject statement is incorrect, your message may be ignored.

### **Rule No. 3: Identify yourself!**

It's a good idea to include your name or user ID and e-mail address in the body of your message. The "From" line the recipient sees may not give enough information, or the information may have changed through various forwarding processes to something completely different.

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Frank Lee

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Make sure you sign your messages by including your name and e-mail address. Some people also include their title, phone number and other contact information in case the recipient wants to contact them through other means. In Microsoft's Outlook Express, you can prepare a standard signature line by selecting Tools from the Menu Bar, then Stationery.

### **Rule No. 4: Have something to say.**

When you post a message, make it substantive. If you're starting a new thread or topic, make sure you say something about it. Don't post a message saying, "Does anyone want to talk about X?"

Also, don't post replies that say simply "Ditto!" or "Me Too!" Remember, you're not obligated to respond to everything you read.

### **Rule No. 5: Edit yourself!**

There's nothing worse than a message that rambles on and on. Remote users in particular will appreciate you not tying up their systems and raising their phone bills. And don't include the entire contents of a previous posting in your reply. Leave just enough so that people will know what you're responding to.

Remember to use standard letter/memo writing practices such as paragraphs, capitalization, and spacing to help get your message across more clearly.

Always read your message before you send it. It's easy to type a quick message with an embarrassing mistake and send it before you've realized what you've written.

## Rule No. 6: Watch your language

Online communications can be depersonalizing; remember, no one can hear the tone of your voice or see the expression on your face. Some of your readers may not be able to tell the difference between a serious comment and a sarcastic one.

One way to deal with this is to use "emoticons" or "smileys". These are the little character-generated faces you see at the end of some messages.

: -)	happy face
: -(	unhappy face
;-)	wink
: -o	shock
>: -(	angry

Try to avoid using fancy desktop publishing features such as boldface and italics. These commands often send a string of control characters that cannot be interpreted by some terminals. And don't overuse caps. Online, capital letters may be interpreted as shouting and are difficult to read. Use your writing skills instead to convince or move your readers.

In response to Bea Wright's comment of 12/2:

> The Smith & Jones book was excellent, the best ever written for advanced clinicians.

I DISAGREE. I DIDN'T LIKE THE SMITH AND JONES BOOK BECAUSE IT WAS TOO LONG.

## Rule No. 7: Protect Yourself!

Don't betray confidences; it's easy to quote a personal message by mistake in a message to the entire group. Note the "To:" and "Cc:" lines in your message before you send it.

Never include mail headers except maybe the "From:" line. If you can't delete lines in your e-mail software, paraphrase or type in the quoted material. Never, ever give out private information such as your password, home address or home phone number to complete strangers.

As an additional precaution, don't make statements that can be interpreted as official positions of your school or workplace. Treat every post as though you were sending a copy to your supervisor, your father, and your worst enemy.

Finally, scrutinize your address list. People have lost their jobs by accidentally forwarding messages to the wrong person!

### **Rule No. 8: Don't get burned by "flames".**

Anything you say on the Internet can and will offend somebody. Misunderstandings, overreactions, hurt feelings, and *flames* (violent verbal expressions of disapproval) are par for the course.

To minimize the fallout from such exchanges, try the following strategies:

- Be tactful in expressing your opinion.
- If your position is misunderstood by someone you respect, apologize, restate your position more clearly, and put it behind you.
- If it's a voluntary discussion group, look around before joining. Read the kinds of comments being posted to learn the do's and don'ts of message exchange.
- When in doubt, defer to the leaders of the group. They not only have more on-line experience, they have earned the respect of other group members.
- Make sure you don't become a flamer yourself. Don't send a message you've written in an angry mood. Put it into a drafts folder and read it again after you've calmed down.

### **Rule No. 9: Educate yourself!**

In response to Bea Wright's comment of 12/2:

> The Smith & Jones book was excellent, the best ever written for advance practice nurses.

That last flamer was bozotic. IMHO, the Smith & Jones book you're describing is a good resource. BTW, Smith & Jones have another book coming out later this year. TTFN

- The Boss

Familiarize yourself with basic NetSpeak. Knowing acronyms such as FAQ (frequently asked questions) and IMHO (in my humble opinion) can facilitate online conversation and minimize misunderstandings. A list of some of the more common jargon and their meaning are listed below.

BTW	By the Way
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
IMHO	In My Humble Opinion
Newbie	New user
ROTFL	Rolling On The Floor Laughing
TTFN	Ta-Ta For Now

## Rule No. 10: Don't Overdo It

Avoid getting caught in mailstorms. If you receive a message with a lot of cc's, ask yourself whether a phone call or a personal visit will be better than an online note. Before you send a message, take a good look at your copy list. Does everybody really need to receive a copy, or are you just being obsessive about covering your trail?



If you follow these simple rules, you'll find that most of your exchanges on the Internet will be trouble-free.

Please contact [techsupport@westernu.edu](mailto:techsupport@westernu.edu) or **909-469-5432** if you have any questions regarding the contents of this document.