

# Netiquette General Guidelines

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Netiquette is best defined as “Guidelines for courteous communication in the online environment.” It includes proper manners for sending Email, conversing in online message forums and chat, and so on.

Here are some guidelines to help you establish and maintain good communication while online, but much of the advice below can be summarized in two simple sentences: **Think twice. Be polite.**

## Know Where You Are:

Netiquette can vary from place to place online. What is considered appropriate in one place might not be somewhere else. Make sure you have reviewed the rules of a site before posting anything.

## Read the FAQ:

If you visit a website that has a Frequently Asked Questions document, start there when looking for answers to a problem. Not only is there a good chance of your answer being there, you’ll get that answer faster than sending in a support request.

FAQ documents are also a good place to find information about a site before posting there. Reading a FAQ before posting can help you avoid asking common questions or making common mistakes.

## Do Your Own Research:

Online groups are excellent resources for getting answers, but it’s not a good idea for anyone – especially students – to use them as a primary resource for information gathering or as a quick way to get answers for class assignments. Do your research first to avoid passing on erroneous information, or getting the wrong answer.

## Be Kind and Professional - Use Respectful Language, Set a Respectful Tone:

All online communication comes with a certain amount of anonymity due to its nature. This can lead people to behave in ways that they wouldn’t when face-to-face with one another. It never hurts to be polite and to maintain a respectful tone.

Name-calling, cursing, using deliberately offensive language and expressing deliberately offensive opinions are inappropriate ways to communicate. Remember that not only will they set a bad tone for your communication, but anything said in any online medium – chat, email, forums, etc. – is probably going to be online forever.

Also remember that it’s not just what you say, it’s how you say it. Text in all caps, for example, is generally viewed as the online equivalent of yelling, so minimize your use of the Caps Lock key.

And don’t forget to say “please” and “thank you” as appropriate. It’s an easy way of keeping communication friendly and productive.

### Spelling, Grammar, and Punctuation are Important:

Always make an effort to use proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Trying to decipher a string of misspelled words with erratic punctuation is both frustrating and time consuming, and will distract the reader from the point of your message.

Also remember that misplaced or missing punctuation can dramatically change the meaning of a sentence!

On the other hand, it's important to be polite and respectful when correcting another person's grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes. If on a public forum, it is recommended to do this through a private message. No matter what, maintain a friendly, helpful tone to minimize potential embarrassment.

### Share with Discretion and Respect the Privacy of Others:

Don't send anybody anything that you wouldn't want shared with the whole world. This is especially important when sharing personal photos and videos.

Likewise, don't share someone else's private information or files with others unless you have their explicit permission.

### Think Before You Type:

As stated before, anything shared online is likely going to be online forever. It never hurts to be polite and respectful in your communications. Generally speaking, if it's not something you'd say or do in public, don't say or do it online.

A passing comment spoken aloud might be forgotten after a few minutes, but something said online is part of the digital record forever.

### Don't Email Large Files, Submit Files the Right Way:

If you have a large file that you need to share, don't do it via Email. Emailing a large attachment can, depending on the Email host, deplete a person's inbox quota, be blocked by the receiving service, or even crash a server (as an extreme example). If the person you need to send the file to doesn't have a place for you to upload it, save it to your own space – such as Google Drive or Dropbox – and send them a link to it.

If you're asked to submit a file in a specific format, and in a specific way, make sure to follow those guidelines to the letter!

### Read Before Replying, and Share Expert Knowledge:

Take the time to read through an email or forum post – especially if multiple people have replied before you – before replying. If the original message was asking a specific question and other people have already responded, odds are very good that someone has already answered the question...submitting an answer that is the same or similar to someone else's makes it look like you haven't paid attention to the conversation thus far.

Answering the *wrong* question, or something other than what was asked, also shows that you weren't paying attention.

That said, don't be afraid to answer if nobody else has, or to build on someone else's answer if you have additional relevant information to add. In addition to being useful to the conversation, it also shows the other readers that you *are* paying attention.

### Fact Check Before Posting or Reposting; Don't Forward Chain Letters or Messages:

Take a few minutes to verify your facts before posting something new, or reposting someone else's message. If you aren't sure of the facts, check with someone who might know, or do a Google search. A few minutes of research can save you a lot of embarrassment.

Don't forget that viruses and malware are often circulated with chain letters or messages and invitations to send information about a subject to your friends. Forwarding that message can do more than just embarrass you, it could damage someone else's computer.

### Respond to Emails in a Timely Manner:

By all means, ignore and delete all of the spam and junk email that you get. But if you have given someone your email address or are in a position where people can contact you via a publicly available email address, it is considered good netiquette to reply to their message within a business day or two. If it is going to take longer to reply, email them and tell them that.

If someone has sent you a question that you don't know how to answer, don't just ignore the message. Write back and tell them, preferably suggesting a better person to contact or a website where they can find the answers to their question.

Remember: You want quick replies when you send messages to other people; so do they.

### Keep Your Contact Information Up to Date:

This one sounds like it should be obvious, but many people forget to do it. Make sure you keep your contact info updated so that others can get in touch with you easily. If something changes – phone number, email address, website URL – make sure you update links to it.

If there are times when you're going to be unavailable, make sure your contact information reflects that, and set up an away message for your email and voicemail if you're going to be away for an extended period.

### Be Forgiving of Other People's Mistakes:

Not everyone has the same amount of experience working in the online world, and not everybody knows the common rules of netiquette. At some point, you will undoubtedly see some violation of the above guidelines; when that happens, practice the same kindness and forgiveness you hope someone else would practice if you made the same mistake. Consider contacting them privately to correct a mistake rather than doing it in a public forum.