

Cyber Netiquette - What is considered good behavior online?

Distance conveys a degree of anonymity, and as a result, many people feel less inhibited in online situations than in their everyday lives. This lessening of inhibitions sometimes leads people to drop their normal standards of decorum when communicating online. In response, good cybercitizens have developed, over the years, an informal set of guidelines for online behavior called Netiquette. Netiquette can be summarized by three simple precepts: Remember that there is a human being on the other end of your communication, treat that human being with respect, and do not transmit any message that you wouldn't be willing to communicate face to face. Some specific corollaries of these precepts follow:

- Be careful what you write about others. Assume that anyone about whom you are writing will read your comments or receive them by some circuitous route.

- Be truthful. Do not pretend to be someone or something that you are not.

- Be brief. Receiving and reading messages costs time and money.

Use titles that accurately and concisely describe the contents of e-mail and other postings.

- Consider your audience, and use language that is appropriate. Excessive use of jargon in a nontechnical chat room, for example, can be bad manners, and remember that children sometimes dial into chat rooms.

- Avoid offensive language, especially comments that might be construed as racist or sexist.

- Remember that the law still applies in cyberspace. Do not commit illegal acts online, such as libeling or slandering others, and do not joke about committing illegal acts.

- Be careful with humor and sarcasm. One person's humorous comment can be another person's boorish or degrading remark.

- Do not post a message more than once. When summarizing, summarize.

- Generally speaking, avoid putting words into full capitals. Online, all-caps is considered SHOUTING.

- If you are following up a previous message or posting, summarize that message or posting.

- Do not post irrelevant messages, referred to in hacker's jargon as spam.

- Do not post messages whose sole purpose is to sucker others into an irrelevant or unimportant discussion. Such messages are known as trolls.

- Read existing follow-up postings and don't repeat what has already been said.

- Respect other people's intellectual property. Don't post, display, or otherwise provide access to materials belonging to others, and cite references as appropriate.

- Temper online expressions of hostility; in hacker's jargon, avoid excessive flaming of others.

- Never send online chain letters.

- Some e-mail programs allow one to place signatures containing text and graphics at the ends of mailings. Remember that elaborate materials take up valuable transmission time, and do not overdo these signatures.
- Limit the length of typed lines to less than 78 characters, and avoid unusual formatting.
- Identify any financial interests related to an e-mail message or posting. If you are selling something, make that fact clear.
- Do not send e-mail to people who might have no interest in it. In particular, avoid automatically copying e-mail to large numbers of people.
- Online messages can be quite informal, but try, nevertheless, to express yourself using proper spelling, capitalization, grammar, usage, and punctuation.
- Avoid chastising others for their online typos. To err is human. To forgive is good cyber-citizenship.