

Resource Guide

Writing an Online Etiquette Policy

Online etiquette, or “netiquette,” policies are essential for creating and maintaining inclusive online classrooms. In discussion boards, it’s easy to misinterpret, or find offensive, the use of all caps, whether in original posts or in peer responses. It’s also easy for miscommunication to occur when students are collaborating in shared Google docs, or for them to feel insecure by dominant commenters. Having a tailored netiquette policy provides intentional structure and guidance for students concerning their communication methods and behavior. Consider the following tips for creating and maintaining a netiquette policy:

- **Establish expectations for language, tone, communication methods, and participation.** Don’t leave your students guessing. What are your expectations for sentence structure, syntax, and grammar? Are text abbreviations, caps, or emoticons acceptable in student work? Should they adopt titles in email communications? Can they participate in Zoom sessions only by sharing their camera, or can they post in the chat, respond to polls, or share their audio with a background image? Committing these expectations to writing will help you prepare for the unexpected.
- **Explain how you will abide by these standards.** A parallel argument can be made that we, as instructors, need to model the behavior and standards we want our students to emulate. Are you practicing the guidelines you want students to follow when drafting emails? Are you writing and speaking to your own students in a warm and supportive tone in class announcements, or in your graded feedback? Explaining how you will uphold these standards, and modeling these behaviors in practice, encourages students to do the same.
- **Co-create some of these expectations with your students.** Consider crowdsourcing different aspects of your netiquette policy with your students to incorporate their individual concerns, needs, and past course experiences. Also ask them to consider sanctions or penalties for unwanted behavior. Should offending discussion posts be deleted? Will students be removed from blogs or group activities due to offensive comments? This is an easy way to encourage student buy-in and show you value their participation and input in the learning process.

Suggested Resources

Kelly, R. (2014). [How to deal with incivility in the online classroom](#). Faculty Focus.

Flaherty, C. (2019). [Re: Hellllllp!!!!](#). Inside Higher Ed.

Mintu-Wimsatt, A, Kernek, C., Lozada, H. (2010). [Netiquette: Make it part of your syllabus](#). MERLOT
Journal of Online Learning and Teaching 6(1), 264-267.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).