

## Perkins Computer Center

### Netiquette and You: A Basic Guide to Etiquette and the Internet

It used to be that if you followed the Golden Rule (Do unto others...) and added a few "please's" and "thank you's," that you were pretty safe against a Miss Manners reprimand. We are now firmly in the Technology Era, however, and the Internet has bred new forms of language, bridged our distances, and created a novel way of interacting. And while it may mirror some of our physical world, it is a whole new realm with its own rules and mores. It may get intimidating to some to maneuver their way around this new web of society. Here are some basic pointers on how to keep your good manners on the Internet, and make your mom proud.

#### Emails, Messaging, Posting:

- DON'T WRITE IN ALL CAPS! All Caps means you are shouting at someone. Unless, of course, you mean to shout at someone. In that case, carry on.
- Humor, especially sarcasm and satire, doesn't translate well on the computer. Especially with strangers, who may not understand that you are just joking. Tread lightly with sarcasm, and clarify that you are not being serious and the recipient shouldn't be either.
- There are handy little things called "emoticons" that are series of keyboard strokes that can be used to convey your feelings. Most commonly consisting of a colon and a parenthesis, these can be used to make a sideways "happy face" or "sad face" symbol. Most of the systems you use (email, Microsoft Word, etc) already have pre-programmed emoticons that run the gamut of emotions and turn them into little cartoon characters that you can insert easily in your correspondence. Be careful to limit these in your professional emails, because while your book club buddy may appreciate your "winking, smiley face" cartoon, your CEO may not.
- Keep your emails brief and focused. Brevity is the soul of, etc.
- Make subject lines specific. Spam (the Internet's version of Junk Mail) accounts for 80%+ of all emails. Get your recipient's attention with clear, concise, and recognizable subjects. Example: "Sloane's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday party invite and directions" = good. "Urgent message" = bad.

#### Language:

- LOL, ROTFL, BRB, GTG...no, it's not Mandarin, it's the Internet's language—or more specifically, it's slang. Respectively, these mean **L**aughing **O**ut **L**oud, **R**olling **O**n **T**he **F**loor **L**aughing, **B**e **R**ight **B**ack, and **G**ot **T**o **G**o. These are another way that people can express their emotions or behaviors, all at the lightning speed of computers. For more, check out our article on Internet Slang.

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### Do's and Don'ts:

- **Do** remember that once you hit the "Enter" or "Send" key and post your message (whether it is an email, a comment on a blog, or a public chat session), it will be out there **forever**, in cyberspace. Even if you delete it from your own files, there is a version of your message saved somewhere. So **don't** write something that you will regret later on. *It will come back to haunt you.*
- **Do** forward interesting, pertinent emails to your friends and family. **Don't** forward SPAM! Junk emails containing advertising, scams, chain letters, etc, are not generally well-received.
- **Do** consider making thoughtful, insightful comments on blogs or discussion boards, if you so choose; **Don't** be a TROLL! *Trolling* is the act of making purposefully incendiary comments on public blogs for the intention of provoking a heated response. On this point, **Don't** Feed the Trolls! It is important to recognize when someone is trying to goad you into an emotional response and to ignore them. They will be controversial, hurtful, and antagonistic—don't feed their behavior by responding and they will move on to another victim.
- **Do** be polite when responding to others. **Don't** start a *flame war*! People will disagree you on various subjects; It is important to respond to them in a mature and respectful manner, regardless of the subject. *Flaming* is the hostile and insulting interaction between Internet users. You may inadvertently offend someone or vice versa; if someone insults you and you react strongly to them, you may start a *flame war*. Flame wars are pointless, hurtful, and do little to change anything. The best response is no response.

The relative anonymity of the Internet can spark both the best and worst of human behavior. People will say and do things on the Internet that they may not have the ability or guile to do in real life. As with anything that can highlight the summits and valleys of our conduct, it is important to be mindful of our interactions with one another. Besides, you never know who is on the other end of that message.