



Online etiquette

Use the same principles when communicating online as you would face-to-face. Be clear and respectful and communicate with the same consideration you would expect from others.

This guide has been designed to help you identify areas of online etiquette that are fundamental to achieving good practice in online environments and email communications. The first section covers good practice guidelines for all types of online communications, and the second includes specifics regarding email communications.

It is valuable to consider the **Three C's** when communicating online: **Context, Content** and **Check**.

CONSIDER THE CONTEXT

Think about the following things before posting:

Who do I wish to communicate with online? Am I communicating with the right person?

Why do I want to communicate online and what purpose does this serve?

Where should I communicate or find answers to my question? Is this the best platform/tool to communicate? (e.g. email, chat, forum, social media etc.)

When is the most appropriate time to communicate? (E.g. are there deadlines/time differences/ consult hours/specified chat times?) Do you need to communicate in real-time (synchronous e.g. chat, skype) or delayed time (asynchronous e.g. forums, blog, email)?

How should I communicate online in a manner suitable to my audience and purpose? (e.g. is my communication personal or professional and should it be formal or informal?)

SHAPE THE CONTENT

When planning your communication think about clarity of information, respect for others, and promoting inclusion.

Clarity:

Keep language clear and simple (use attachments if you need to elaborate). Use dot points to aid clarity.

Use an audience appropriate communication style (e.g. professional)

Remember that **text has no tone or body language**

Use humour wisely as it can be misinterpreted (especially sarcasm and irony)

Stay focussed on the topic (especially if participating in chat or forum discussion)

Use headings/subject titles for online posts and emails

Avoid excessive use of capital letters as IT APPEARS AS THOUGH YOU ARE SHOUTING!

Respect:

Address others by name to acknowledge ideas and add a human touch (remain gender neutral)

Politely disagree with information by acknowledging an individual's interpretation before suggesting an alternative interpretation (do not make it personal)

Use appropriate language so as to avoid offending others or contributing to harassment or discrimination (e.g. avoid inappropriate comments about race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation)

Avoid flaming (posting hostile messages that provoke arguments) by remaining calm in a situation online where conflicting ideas are presented, and ensure communication does not single someone out or blame/offend others

Do not share offensive content such as copyright data, private files, or illegal/inappropriate content.

Report offensive content or disrespectful communication to the appropriate person (e.g. tutor if it is an issue within your subject).

Inclusion:

Avoid exclusionary language (e.g. abbreviations, inside jokes) that may prevent others from understanding or participating in the conversation

Share the floor allowing others to respond rather than dominating a conversation

Contribute your ideas to online discussions

Listen to the ideas of others and build upon these, especially when working as a team

Acknowledge the ideas of others and reference sources that have informed your post

Ask questions to clarify ideas rather than accusing others of miscommunication

Commend and encourage others by acknowledging positive discussion points

CHECK BEFORE COMMUNICATING ONLINE

Correct language

Check for spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors

Headspace

Make sure you are in the right frame of mind to post information online. Never hit “send” if you feel angry or unsure

Evaluative feedback from others

If in doubt share your ideas and trial your communication with others first

Consider audience interpretation

How might the audience misinterpret information and how can this be avoided? (E.g. Does my message require the use of tone or body language? Might the content or use of humour offend? Do I need to provide contextual information?)

Keep content appropriate

Check that the style of communication and language used is appropriate to the audience you are addressing and the purpose of your communication.

Email etiquette

The basic principles of online etiquette apply to email communication. So that lecturers can respond appropriately and in a timely manner, students should observe basic requirements of professional communication:

CONSIDER THE CONTEXT OF YOUR EMAIL

Before you initiate contact with your subject coordinator, lecturer or tutor consider the following:

- Is your question addressed elsewhere, such as the subject outline, or on the eLearning site or student central?
- Would you be better to speak in person to the academic, by using one of their advertised consultation times?
- If your subject coordinator has set up a general forum in the eLearning site, ask non-personal questions about the subject in that forum that way other students will be able to benefit from the answer given.

BE CLEAR AND CONCISE IN YOUR EMAIL

- Use the subject line to include the subject code and concise information including subject name, tutorial group number etc. e.g. EESC150 assignment 1 request for extension.
- Succinctly describe the problem / ask your question.
- Use dot points if you have a number of questions / points.
- Reread your email thoroughly to make sure that it makes sense and all relevant information is included.

PROFESSIONAL COURTESY

- It is a requirement that you use your UOW email account if you wish to email your lecturer or tutor. If you use your personal email account they most likely will not reply, due to the potential privacy issues involved (as there is no way of verifying the email came from you).
- **DO NOT** use social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook etc.) to contact your lecturer or tutor. It is a requirement that you use your UOW email account to contact your lecturer or tutor.
- Do not expect your lecturer to be available 24/7. Allow 3-4 working days for a response before following up.

Figure 1 provides an example of an appropriate email. It is respectful and states succinctly the nature of the request.

- Be respectful and address the staff member appropriately, using title (e.g. Doctor, Prof., etc.) and name. Use first names only if you are familiar with the person, or they have indicated that is their preference.
- In the subject outline, clearly state the nature of the email.
- In the body of the email, state your request and rationale (if appropriate).

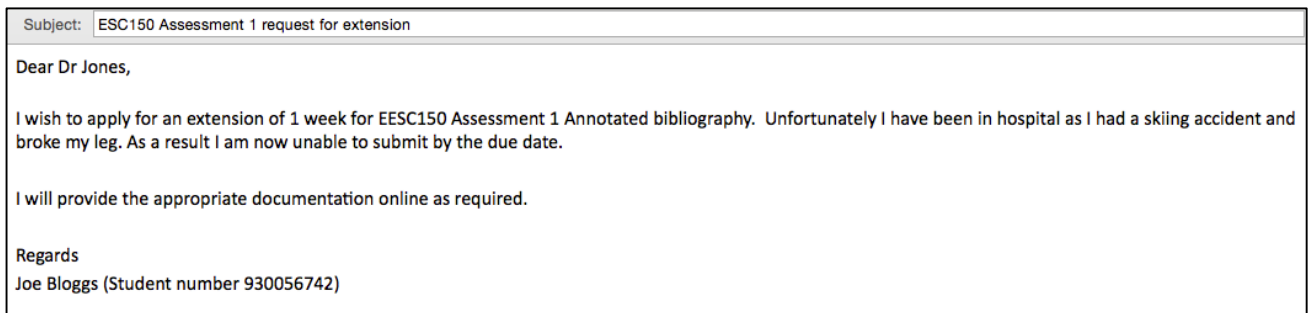


Figure 1 Example of an appropriate email

Compare Figure 1 to Figure 2, which shows an example of an inappropriate email. Figure 2 does not include relevant information in the subject line, and does not provide enough information in the body of the email. It uses a casual approach and assumes familiarity and does not provide information about the student such as subject code/details, surname or student number. Unfortunately, academic staff members all too often receive emails such as that shown in Figure 2, and time is wasted clarifying details with the student. Although probably meant to be tongue in cheek, the comment about providing the academic with a 'gift' is inappropriate, and could be considered to be trying to bribe the academic.



Figure 2 Example of an inappropriate email

References

University of New England 2011, *CYBERETHICS@UNE A guide to staying safe (and out of trouble) when online*, viewed 10 September 2014, http://www.une.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/38104/cyberethics.pdf

University of Tasmania 2014, *Netiquette for online communications*, viewed 10 September 2014, <https://mylo.utas.edu.au/d21/lor/viewer/view.d21?ou=6607&loIdentId=69404>