Appendix 8

Student guidelines to be included in Module Guide

Online communication (netiquette) guidelines for Edinburgh Napier University students

Higher education institutions increasingly rely on electronic tools for communication among students and between students and instructors. If you are enrolled in an online module or programme, you will soon discover that you have more opportunities to communicate with your fellow classmates and tutor than you would in the lecture theatre or seminar room. E-mail, listservs, chat rooms and discussion boards are all valuable tools for exchange of thoughts and queries at anytime from your home, place of work or on campus. It is important, however, for online communicators to maintain a respectful online voice at all times. Without the visual and oral cues of standing face to face with someone, written messages are easily misunderstood or may even unintentionally offend. In order to prevent misunderstandings and promote engaging and meaningful collaboration, extra care must be taken into how you express yourself in your written communication.

Above all, remember that there is a human being at the receiving end!
Whether in an e-mail, online discussion or chat room, you are expected to adhere to the following online etiquette or 'netiquette' guidelines.

The right tone

1.   Always maintain a cordial and respectful tone in written messages. When in doubt, ask yourself, 'Would I feel comfortable saying this to the person standing in front of me?'

2.   Make life easier for the recipient: Always address the person being written to by name, clearly indicate who the message or post is coming from and add a descriptive subject heading.

3.   Never use BLOCK capitals, which is shouting online.

4.   Treat any online discussions, chats or e-mail contributions confidentially. Remember, however, that e-mail messages in general are not secure. Don't reveal more than you would on a postcard, for example!

5.   Reread your written text before posting or emailing.

6.   Wait 24 hours before responding to a seemingly inflammatory message or post. Online conflicts unnecessarily tend to get blown out of proportion. A

good rule of thumb is to give the author the benefit of the doubt and to end your response with a positive statement.

Cultural considerations

Edinburgh Napier University is proud of its diverse student body, but it is important to recognise that the challenges of online communication are magnified in classes of native and non-native speakers. While international collaboration undoubtedly enriches learning by exposing students to different cultures, beliefs and values, the non-native speaker is usually less confident and can easily feel uncomfortable among native speaking online communicators, especially in the synchronous setting of a chat room. In addition different cultures bring different points of reference, different understandings of humour and different expectations of online communication.

In order to avoid misunderstandings and to promote an encouraging environment for all communicators always take the following guidelines into consideration before posting or sending your message:

1. Avoid using complicated language, terminology, slang, idioms or local acronyms.
2. Be aware of differences in date formats and measurements.
3. Be careful with sarcasm and humour, avoid ridicule.
4. Allow extra time for responses, especially in chats.
5. Remember that language fluency does not reflect intelligence.
6. Admit mistakes and apologise.

Communication management

Good online communication practice is also about being mindful of online communicators' ownership, time and bandwidth. The following tips will help keep online communication manageable and enjoyable for all involved.

1. Be aware of the copyright on the material you are posting or sending. Acknowledge the owner of any material that is not your own.

2. Never forward a written text without the author's consent.

3. Avoid replying directly to emails containing file attachments-this unnecessarily fills up the original sender's mailbox.

4. Be careful when using the reply feature in listservs or the 'cc' button when sending your e-mail. Ask yourself if your message is really relevant to all recipients.

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5.   Check for the validity of e-mail. Realise that hoaxes, spam mail, forgery and viruses are easily sent via e-mail. When in doubt the mail is best left unopened and then deleted.

6.   In an online discussion, reply to an existing post only if your thoughts are directly related to it. Otherwise create a new message. This eases threading for all later on.

7.   In general, keep your online texts as short as possible without being terse or evasive. Your instructor may provide you with word count guidelines for the discussion board.

8.   Use the online discussion board's 'compile' feature for ease of reading long discussion threads.

References

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Shea, V. (2004) The core rules of netiquette available online at **http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html**