The basics rules of Netiquette

**What is netiquette?**

Netiquette is a portmanteau of net and etiquette, and refers to the socially acceptable rules of online conduct. The definition of netiquette includes self-presentation standards, behavior norms, and accepted forms of expression. Proper netiquette helps you avoid offending friends, employers, and other people in your social network.

Humans are social creatures, and while understanding cultural norms comes naturally in our physical environments, it can be harder in digital spaces. But online messaging platforms and the rise of social media have led to an implicit agreement on global communication standards. Even “digital natives” — those immersed in digital tech from birth — can benefit from a crash course in internet manners.

Your digital footprint is as real as your actual footprint. And with online tracking technology, it can be traced just as easily. Netiquette helps you prevent identity theft and other types of cybercrime by safeguarding your personal information and protecting your communications. Netiquette also helps you book appointments more smoothly, develop relationships more effectively, and find information more quickly.

Here are the 10 basic rules of netiquette:

**1. Represent yourself well**

Self-presentation is crucial online, because of the lack of visual cues. Your word and punctuation choices matter, so make every stroke count. To make friends or develop networks, be friendly, polite, and engaging— just as you would be in real life.

**Be careful with sarcasm**

Sarcasm relies on tone of voice, body language, facial expression, and gesture — all are omitted when communicating online. A well-intended joke can be perceived as confusing or downright insulting without clarity.

**Check your grammar**

Friends might not care about proper grammar, but employers and colleagues do. Avoid heavy slang, unusual acronyms, abbreviations, alternate spellings, and other internet shorthand when communicating in a professional capacity. Though it may seem more natural to communicate this way online, it can come across as impatient and immature in professional settings.

**2. Respect other people’s privacy**

Digital privacy is just as important as physical privacy. Confirm with the sender before forwarding an email to someone else — they may have intended it for your eyes only.

Spreading someone’s email around can also cause them to get spam, which no one likes. Ask someone before tagging them in your social media posts. No one wants an unflattering photo spread among people they don’t know, and some people might be social-media shy in general. Posting without consent can be a huge breach of someone’s privacy and security.

**3. If you wouldn't say it directly, don't say it online**

Whether you’re communicating with strangers or friends, don’t let your emotions do the talking online. Interacting behind a screen can make you feel invincible, and can remove your social filter in the worst possible way. It’s easy to be blunt, rude, or aggressive when your words appear as squiggles on a screen. But those squiggles cause real pain, and can easily turn you into a troll, or worse, a cyberbully.

**4. Follow the rules**

Just like real-life hangouts, every internet subculture has their own core rules and definitions of netiquette. If the rules are implicit, ask around or “lurk” (read without posting) for a while to get the feel for the proper netiquette policy. If the rules are explicit, they’ll be posted somewhere clearly. Rules might include acceptable topics to discuss, formatting procedures, link policies, or just a general code of behavior.

**5. Fact check**

It’s embarrassing to get facts wrong, and it can cause others to stop trusting you or stop communicating with you completely. Getting accurate information is a hard-wired human preference, and being misinformed can really hit a nerve. Research thoroughly before making factual claims online. Some quick googling and linking to source websites builds trust with others.

**6. Respect people's time and boundaries**

The exciting urge to share something is natural, but sending long YouTube videos or articles to others constantly can be imposing. Pick and choose your moments, or explain why you feel the other person might enjoy it.

**7. Respond as promptly as you can**

It’s annoying when someone expects you to respond to a text or email immediately, but it’s just as annoying when you write to someone and they take forever to respond, or don’t reply at all. If you have exchanged emails with someone, the expectation is that email correspondence is OK, so not responding can be hurtful or rude.

**8. Keep your information up to date**

Update your profile information, especially if you’re not in contact with lots of old friends or acquiantances.

If you own a physical business with an online presence, keep your hours of operation accurate. Most people rely on Google or other services to organize their visits, and inaccurate information can lead to a bad review or a lost customer.

**9. Send files properly**

Don’t send or attach large files directly, since you never know what kind of storage space or internet connection other people have. Use a cloud service or a personal site, especially if you want to share lots of files. If you have to send sensitive files, use some of the best encryption software to keep them safe. And protect files with a password to show the recipient you care about their digital safety.

**10. Be forgiving**

One of the most important netiquette rules is to forgive others’ mistakes. Internet technology netiquette norms can be confusing — we all learn web etiquette as we go along. What we say online feels permanent, which makes us all uneasy. No one wants a rushed, misinterpreted statement hanging over their heads forever, so have compassion for others if you want it extended to yourself.