

THE PRACTICE OF ONLINE CIVILITY

An online or on-site course is a macrocosm of society-at-large and reflects the diversity of opinions, experiences and cultural norms. The purpose of this document is to cover what the differences between rudeness, politeness and egalitarian discussions could look like in a discussion forum.

Knowing your Audience

An academic environment differs from casual ones. In an academic environment, write in complete sentences explaining your ideas in detail. Use proper grammar.

Anonymity -vs- Identity. In an online or on-site course, you are still an individual and not anonymous. This differs when one considers that in cyberspace you assume an anonymous name and by doing so you could have conversations that test these ideas of democratic civility. This is not the common practice in academia.

Realize you are speaking to other humans on the other side of the monitor.

Respect the Conversation

Respect the limited time a conversation takes place (aka the great wall of text)

Stay on topic. If a conversation goes off-topic that might be acceptable in some circumstance but always try to stay on topic or bring the conversation around to main points of the discussion.

Be empathetic in your ability to listen to others even if you do not agree. Be open to persuasion to understand another's point of view.

A diverse array of opinions (political, religious or otherwise) and experiences can add to a conversation and embody the idea of the democratic education environment.

Carefully monitor the tone of your contributions to the conversation.

Avoid being offended – instead be empathic and realize the offense may not have been intended.

Personal Conduct – Is this Politeness?

Stay positive and encourage others to do so. Being positive does not mean you are in agreement with something but that you are listening and trying to understand another's point of view.

Likewise, remaining positive can adversely affect the conversation by not bringing in your vantage point. A civil discourse requires a variety of opinions and experiences.

When in doubt on how to respond to someone's post – wait 24 hours to respond or not at all.

“When nothing works: do nothing”

The choice of words you use are important but should not prevent you from testing ideas or exploring thoughts that are not fully formed.

Model civil behavior. If an online conversation is not working, take it offline.

Language -vs- Text

Write in your own voice and words.

Don't say anything you wouldn't say to that person's face.

Do not use CAPITAL LETTERS in your postings. In the online world, capital letters are the equivalent of shouting.

Refrain from using IM-type acronyms of words such as IDK, OMG and the like in discussion forums.

Privacy & Identity

Share what you are comfortable sharing but maybe sharing too much might infringe on what others feel uncomfortable reading. It is difficult to know with any degree of precision what is sharing and what is divulging one's life story.

What is shared in your course should be considered confidential. This includes email addresses of your classmates and those who are not enrolled.

Do not utilize contact information for your classmates or instructor for purposes outside of the course (e.g. business).

Although respect for privacy is the expectation, it is not guaranteed. Do not share information you do not want to be made public.