Statement of Appropriate Online Behavior

What is Netiquette?

It is important to use the Internet and email responsibly. Respectful communication with others and a cooperative attitude when taking advantage of the many resources available on the Internet are indispensable. This is why the essential practice of Netiquette (net etiquette) has developed over time.

Netiquette is a set of behaviors that should be adhered to when you travel down the Information super-highway. It is also termed as a professional code of behavior for electronic communication. Generally speaking, there are very few actual "Net Laws", and the Internet community itself generally devises those that exist. Therefore, the job of policing the Net is up to those who use it.

Here are five guidelines some faculty have used to explain to their students how to become a welcomed member of the electronic community:

- **Remember that you're communicating with another human being**
  Because of the lack of non-verbal clues, it's easy to misinterpret the other person's meaning. Remember that the recipient has feelings more or less like your own. Stand up for yourself and your beliefs but be sensitive to other people's feelings. Never write something to someone on email or in a discussion group that you would not say to those persons in a face-to-face encounter. Avoid sending heated messages (called "flaming") even if you're provoked. As many users have learned to their dismay, email can be misaddressed or forwarded, sometimes with devastating consequences.

  Also bear in mind that even thought you may delete a message from your computer system, chances are that the message remains, perhaps for years, on your computer network's backup tape.

- **Behave ethically**
  Standards of online behavior are simply different from, but not lower than, those for personal behavior.
    o Do not use a computer to steal.
    o Do not use a computer to bear false witness.
    o Do not use or copy software for which you have not paid.
    o Do not use other people's computer resources without authorization.
    o Do not appropriate other people's intellectual output.

- **Lurk before you leap**
  When you enter a discussion group that's new to you, take time to look around. Read

messages for a while to get a sense of how the people who are already there act. Then go ahead and participate. Bad information spreads like wildfire on the Internet.

- **Respect other people's time and bandwidth**
  When you send a message via email or a discussion group, you're taking up other people's time. Therefore, make sure the time they spend reading your message is time well spent. You're also taking up bandwidth, the information-carrying capacity of the telephone lines or networks used to transmit your message. Don't copy more people than necessary in an email note, don't include a copy of the original message in your reply unless necessary, and be careful about posting the same message to more than one newsgroup.

- **Finally, be tolerant of other people**
  Electronic communication can be a scary place for novices, and we were all network newbies once. So when someone makes a mistake, whether it's a spelling error, a stupid question, an irrelevant comment, or an unnecessarily long answer, be kind. If you want to be helpful, point out errors by a private email message, not by public posting to a newsgroup. Give people the benefit of the doubt.

Other Hints for Online Etiquette

The written word is a powerful tool in terms of communication, so caution should be taken in how it is used on the Internet. Remember: the email message will almost always be taken at face value. Keep sarcasm to a minimum or delete it altogether.

Some E-Mail Netiquette Hints and Tips:

- Using all capital letters gives a word very strong emphasis. It can also have the effect of **SHOUTING**!
- Enclosing a word with asterisks has a different effect. Asterisks indicate a mild emphasis and serve the same purpose as italics.
- Signature "smileys" can help to indicate mood or tone of voice:
  - :-)   I'm happy.
  - ;-)   Just Joking.
  - :-(I'm unhappy.
- Be careful when replying to a message. If your reply is to be automatically sent back to the originating address, verify that the address if not connected to a list or groups. As personal response intended for a specific person may end up in the hands of many.
- Common Net acronyms include:
  - FAQ   Frequently asked questions
  - FYI   For Your Information
  - BTW   By the way
  - IMHO   In my humble/honest opinion
  - RTM   Read the Manual
  - LOL   Laughed out loud
  - YMMV   Your Mileage May Vary

Source: *Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Teaching Excellence*
        www.vcu.edu/cte/resources/OTLRG/04_12_Behavior.html

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- Electronic mail is not protected and not private. Your message can be forwarded or copied to anyone, anywhere.
- Never send chain letters over the Internet. They are annoying and forbidden by some ISP's and have no place in a class.
- Angry or heated messages are called "flames". They are childish and never necessary.
- Use the subject RE: line to clearly state the topic of your message.

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