

Hibernia College Quality Framework

Guidelines for Engaging in Online Communication



HIBERNIA
COLLEGE

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this resource is to set out guidelines that enable successful communication in online settings by Hibernia College faculty, adjunct faculty, staff and students. Online communication can create barriers that do not exist in face-to-face communication due to the lack of visual and paralinguistic (facial expression, intonation, gesture, body orientation) cues and time gaps within conversations. Practising good *netiquette*, the etiquette of the online environment, can help to promote understanding and minimise conflict in online communication.

1.2 Scope

This resource applies to all Hibernia College staff, faculty, adjunct faculty and students when participating in any type of online communication.

1.3 Definitions

1.3.1 Netiquette

'Netiquette' is the 'etiquette' of the Internet. Etiquette can be defined as 'the customary code of polite behaviour in society or among members of a particular profession or group.'¹ Therefore, netiquette is the code of behaviour that underpins our participation in any type of online communication.

1.3.2 Online communication

Online communication in this context refers to any type of communication that occurs using Hibernia College Information and Communications Technology (ICT) resources. These resources can include, but are not limited to, the virtual learning environment (including discussion forums), video-conferencing, mobile applications and email.

2 Standards of Behaviour and Professional Conduct

All communications with Hibernia College, either in person or through online communication, are considered professional engagements rather than personal ones. Accordingly, all online communication should be treated as professional interactions.

Before engaging in any type of online communication, whether that is an email, posting in a discussion forum or participating in an online class, ask yourself the following questions²:

- Might what I'm contributing reflect poorly on me, the College or a future employer?
- Who could see or hear my contribution?
- Am I confident that the contribution, if accessed by others (for example, peers, tutors, College staff), would be considered appropriate, reasonable and professional?
- Is the contribution for personal or professional reasons, and is it relevant to the context at hand?
- Could it be misunderstood? Could it offend?

Normal College regulations apply to online communication including the *Student Charter*, *Policy for Academic Good Practice* and *Policy for Ensuring Minimum Standards of Student Conduct*.

¹ <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/etiquette>

² Adapted from the Teaching Council's [Draft Guidelines for Registered Teachers about the Use of Social Media](#)

3 Netiquette in Online Communication

Netiquette in Online Communication



Standards and values

Apply the same standards and values online that you would in the rest of your College life. Online communication is subject to the same expectations of behaviour as all other College interactions.

Response times

In all online communication, try to respond in a timely manner. However, it is not reasonable to expect immediate responses. It can be helpful to indicate response times to set clear expectations.

Being kind and respectful

Be kind, courteous and respectful in all your online interactions. Respect the views and opinions expressed by others. Criticise the idea, not the person.

Being mannerly

'Please' and 'thank you' are still important online. Avoid using CAPITALS when typing as it can imply that you are shouting. Sarcasm, wit and humour can be lost in translation and so should be used with care. Don't dominate a discussion.

Being prepared to forgive

It can be easy to misinterpret others or misrepresent ourselves. Avoid 'flaming' an interaction by quickly reacting if you see something that offends or upsets you online because it may be unintended. If it is appropriate to reply, take a break before replying.

Being positive

Engage positively in your online interactions. Connect with, encourage and support others. Share information and provide constructive feedback. Bullying, harassment and discrimination are not acceptable in any medium. Online interactions should not be derogatory or offensive.

Staying within the law

Remain aware of your responsibilities to act within the law in relation to defamation, copyright, data protection and so on. Do not share confidential information about yourself or others. Do not post anything you would not be happy to see printed in a news article.

Acknowledging others

In online communication, our typical visual cues such as nodding, smiling or frowning are significantly reduced or removed entirely. To show people that we are listening, it is good netiquette to overtly acknowledge and support people's input either verbally or in a text response.

Grammar

Always try to use simple language as well as correct punctuation, spelling and grammar. Do not use overly verbose language or slang that would not be appropriate in a professional setting. Equally, be forgiving about others' grammar mistakes. Giving out to a peer because they used 'your' instead of 'you're' is not good netiquette.

Creating posts

In discussion forums, always check to see if there is an existing post similar to what you want to discuss before creating a new thread. When creating a thread, always give your message a clear and concise subject title to make it easier for others to identify. Do not create posts that are not relevant to the discussion.

Seeking your own answers first

If you are confused about an assessment or a College process, it can be your first instinct to immediately ask a question. Before asking, see if you can figure it out on your own.

For questions related to programme delivery, check your course calendar. For assessment queries, check the assignment brief and forum to see if your query has already been addressed. For policies and procedures, check the Hibernia College Quality Framework.

Preparing technology

Technology should always be tested in advance of a class. Ensure that your microphone, camera and any other necessary technology is working. Keep your audio muted in online classes, unless you wish to speak.

Social presence in online classes

Students are required to use full names in online classes. The use of pseudonyms or nicknames is not permitted. Turning on cameras is a great way to enhance social presence in the online classroom, even for a few minutes at the beginning of class as an icebreaker. Use Zoom 'reactions' or the comment box to indicate that you want to ask a question but do not use the chat box to discuss non-class-related topics. Remember that 'private' messages appear in the chat transcript, so treat these as public messages.

4 Guidelines for Online Collaboration for Academic Purposes

Online collaboration is a fantastic way to build communities of practice in blended learning. Careful design and use of evidence-based practice can set faculty, adjunct faculty and students up for success in the online learning environment.

The following principles should be applied when using online collaboration:

- All collaboration should have a specific purpose, be aligned to module learning outcomes, where appropriate, and have a clear rationale and benefit for learners.
- Users should ensure they are posting to the correct forum and cross-posting should always be avoided.
- Availability and expectations for engagement should be clearly defined from the outset. Some users may prefer working non-standard hours, but everyone should have a reasonable expectation of when they can expect to receive a reply, if replies will be given to individual posts, or to general themes, or at all. Urgent queries should not be posted to forums that do not have continuous monitoring.

4.1 Guidelines for Students

- Students should respond to posts and engage with their peers to show that they are listening and engaging.
- Students should direct their peers to queries that have already been answered to promote collegiality.
- Students should take care to avoid 'nuisance posting', which can include repeating queries that have already been addressed, posting off-topic content or dominating discussions rather than engaging in constructive discussions.
- Private modes of communication such as email or phone should be used when students have sensitive personal queries that they wish to discuss with a staff member.
- The [3C&Q model](#) can be used to engage in collegiate and constructive discussions.

4.2 Guidelines for Faculty and Adjunct Faculty

- Faculty and adjunct faculty should post early and regularly to model behaviour and responses to show students they are listened to and to make sure that discussions stay on track.
- If the number of students participating in a collaborative discussion is high, encourage students to answer each other's queries and to provide signposts to correct answers to allow for more targeted moderation.
- Summarising key points or creating an FAQ section at the end of a thread can be a good way to address common queries rather than responding to repeated queries.
- If individual students are not engaging, contact them using a more private mode of communication such as email or phone to check in on their progress. Equally, private modes of communication should be used to contact students individually, and as early as possible, if negativity arises in a collaborative space.
- Where participation in collaboration is graded, it should be graded for quality rather than quantity. It can help to create a two-staged process where students answer a directed prompt and are required to build on that response and others' responses at a later date to avoid a last-minute flurry of activity.

5 References

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6 Document Control

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