

Chapter 10 Netiquette

What is Netiquette?

Searching the Net - commonly known as Surfing - is fun and exciting. The Net is a great resource for everything from understanding the do's and don'ts of buying a new car, to paying bills, to researching school term papers. Over the Net you can purchase concert tickets, order steaks for the weekend cookout, and make new friends. The ability to communicate with people and visit places all over the world from the comfort of your home, classroom, or office is amazing.

It is important, however, to use this great communication tool responsibly. Respectful communication with others and a cooperative attitude when taking advantage of the many resources available on the Internet must be taken into consideration. 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 traveling down the information superhighway. Generally speaking there are very few actual "Net Laws" (excluding Federal laws for prosecuting Internet hackers, virus terrorists, etc.), and those that exist are generally devised by the Internet community itself. Therefore, the job of policing the Net is up to those who use it. We have surfed the Web and asked our experts for general Internet behaviors and compiled the list below.

E-Mail 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: an email message will almost always be taken at face value. The reader is not afforded the luxury of nuance. Since your message will not be accompanied by facial expression or vocal inflection, it is imperative that you write with clarity and courtesy. Keep sarcasm to a minimum or delete it altogether.

This does not mean that mail to friends cannot be funny or mildly satiric, but be aware that your message can be misinterpreted. Know your audience and, above all, minimize the risks.

- Electronic mail is not protected and not private. Your message can be forwarded or copied to anyone, anywhere. Think of it as an electronic postcard - fully exposed and able to be read by anyone who comes in contact with it. Computer and network hackers can easily access anything sent across the Internet. Assume anyone with a computer has the potential to read your message. Be careful what you write.
- Never send chain letters over the Internet. Not only are they annoying but they are forbidden by many Internet service providers and if you participate in sending then your privileges may be revoked.
- Angry or heated messages are called "flames." Everyone seems to agree that "flames" are childish and never necessary. Take the time to calm down before sending emotional responses
- Use the subject or RE: line to clearly state the topic of your message. This is the first thing the recipient will see in their e-mail directory.
- Keep messages concise. When replying to a message be sure to include enough information from the original message so that your reply is understood. Delete anything from the original message that is irrelevant.
- Messages should have lines that are no more than 65-70 characters in length and generally no more than 12 lines. Do not assume that the person has the same size screen or that the wrap feature will automatically make the message "fit."
- If you send a long message, it is a good idea to tell the recipient at the beginning of the message so that they have the option of downloading it to read later.

There are many other rules and procedures that you will learn as you become an experienced Net user. School labs and office environments will have their own procedures that are strictly enforced.