

# GUIDELINES FOR PRODUCTIVE ONLINE CONVERSATIONS

## NETIQUETTE

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1. Respect the privacy of your classmates and what they share in class.
2. Ask classmates for clarification if you find a discussion posting offensive or difficult to understand.
3. Avoid sweeping generalizations. Back up your stated opinions with facts and reliable sources.
4. Understand that we may disagree and that exposure to other people's opinions is part of the learning experience.
5. Be respectful of each other. We're all in this together. Before posting a comment, ask whether you would be willing to make the same comment to a person face-to-face.
6. Keep in mind that everything you write, indeed every click of your mouse is recorded on the network server. On the Internet there are no take backs.
7. Keep in mind that you are taking a college class. Something that would be inappropriate in a traditional classroom is also inappropriate in an online classroom.

## GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS

1. Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
2. Allow everyone the opportunity to speak.
3. Criticize ideas, not individuals or groups.
4. Avoid inflammatory language, including name-calling.
5. Ask questions when you don't understand; don't assume you know others' thinking or motivations.
6. Don't expect any individuals to speak on behalf of their gender, ethnic group, class, status, etc. (or the groups we perceive them to be a part of). Be aware that typing in all capital letters indicates shouting.
7. Be careful with humor and sarcasm. Both can easily be misunderstood.
8. Review all discussion postings before posting your own to prevent redundancy.
9. Check your writing for errors by reviewing what you've written before submitting it.
10. Acronyms (LOL, etc.) and emoticons (similies) are commonly used online, but be careful not to overuse them.
11. Many communications with your instructor or fellow students are best handled through email.
12. Only post on the classroom discussion board if the conversation is relevant to others in the class.

Kennedy, A., & on, P. D. (2016, February 11). *Tips for Online Students: Participating in Class Discussions*. CSU Online ValuED Blog. <http://blog.online.colostate.edu/blog/online-education/tips-for-online-students-participating-in-class-discussions/>

*Managing Difficult Classroom Discussions*. (n.d.). Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning. Retrieved March 23, 2020, from <https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/diversity-inclusion/managing-difficult-classroom-discussions/index.html>

Netiquette Guidelines. (n.d.). Online Student Expectations. Retrieved February 28, 2013, from <http://blogs.lsc.edu/expectations/netiquette-guidelines/>

## MANAGING DISCUSSIONS

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Some conversations in online courses address difficult or controversial topics, and these require specific preparation. Teaching online changes the context for how we have conversations in the classroom and requires appropriate strategies and techniques. Topics like race, culture, gender, and/or sexual orientation can come up in many fields, and any course dealing with current events presents an opportunity for politically-charged topics to arise spontaneously in class discussions. How we manage those discussions, however, can greatly impact how useful the conversations are to our instructional goals, and what sort of impact they have on the dynamics of the class.

## PREPARING

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In situations where you know you will be addressing a controversial topic, you can prepare for the discussion in ways that set the stage for success. Consider possible sources of student views. On many issues, students' viewpoints may be wrapped up in their personal identities, influenced by family members, or connected to religious/spiritual/moral beliefs. So a challenge to an idea may be seen as a personal challenge as well. Just being aware of these deeper origins of student opinions—both for you and their classmates—may be useful in approaching delicate conversations.

## PRE-DISCUSSION

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Provide pre-discussion assignments. Ask students to complete an assignment in advance that helps them understand and articulate their own views, as well as others they have heard. Such pre-discussion homework can help them reflect on those views, understand potential reasons behind them, and connect them to disciplinary content in the course. Such activities let them do some more logical thinking in advance, before any emotional barriers get thrown up during a heated discussion.

