

1. **Remember the Golden Rule:**
"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you". This Rule underwrites all the other guidelines contained in this Guide.
2. **Think before you write, and think twice before you send**
It is much more difficult to take back something that you've written than something that you've said. Don't send anything in writing that you wouldn't feel comfortable saying to someone in person.
3. **Take a few moments to proofread before you send something**
Frequent typographical errors or misspellings will distract your readers, and may leave a bad impression.
4. **Be precise, but also be clear**
No one should have to work very hard to understand another person's main point. Give enough background information to allow everyone to follow your idea, but not so much background material that you'll bore your readers.
5. **Use quotations to clarify your point**
If you're responding to someone else's posting in an online discussion, copy and paste the most relevant passage from that posting into your response. Doing this will allow your readers to see quickly and exactly what you are responding to. Be selective when choosing your quotations: if you're responding to only one part of a previous posting, there's no reason to quote the entire post!
6. **Avoid acronyms**
Do not use acronyms like IMHO (In My Humble Opinion), WAYTA (What Are You Talking About?), or FWIW (For What It's Worth). Not everyone will be familiar with this 'Net shorthand, and your acronym may confuse or slow down others' ability to understand your posting. If you encounter an unfamiliar acronym online, ask the writer for clarification, or see if the acronym is defined on a webpage like Tangled Web Productions' Acronym Page: www.tangled.com/acronyms.htm.
7. **Remember that your audience might be international and inter-cultural**
For the Web to live up to its full name (World Wide Web), users must be sensitive to the fact that Web audiences are composed of people from different cultures. Don't be "ethnocentric" when posting material on the Web: always consider that readers may not be familiar with aspects of your culture that you take for granted as "common knowledge." Provide a brief description of any term or idea that may be unfamiliar to members of your audience.
8. **Avoid potentially offensive terminology**
Unless you are consciously trying to annoy people, you should avoid using words that could be considered sexist, racist, ageist, and any other perspective that reflects insensitivity, prejudice, and bias based on ignorant disrespect. Don't curse or swear online, either: in most venues, using swear words is considered highly rude. People will pay attention to your words, rather than to the idea you're trying to communicate so forcefully.
9. **Be nice! Prevent a "flame" from developing into a firestorm**
A "flame" is an online posting that takes a particularly nasty, mean-spirited tone. For better or worse, many people will say things online that they would never say to someone in a face-to-face situation. Avoid criticizing a person online; instead, offer an alternative perspective on what the person has written. Personal attacks inhibit communication by raising everyone's defenses. Try to ignore others' attempts to provoke a violent response. If you take offense to something online, express your feelings calmly to the appropriate person – preferably by private e-mail, rather than in a public forum.
10. **Be cautious when using humor (especially sarcasm)**
This is one of the most common occasions for offense and misunderstanding in online communication. Not everyone will understand that you are trying to be funny. See the following rule.

11. Use "emoticons" to express your emotions online

Emoticons (icons that express emotions) may strike some people as unnecessary or silly, but they have a very valid purpose in online communication. Since we cannot see others' facial expressions in most online situations, these icons can provide important information about a person's intentions when writing something. The most commonly used emoticon is sometimes called a "smiley"— :) or J. You can create the first smiley by typing a colon followed by a right-facing parenthesis. (Many word-processing programs now include "smileys" in their repertoire of font choices.) A "winking smiley" is often used after someone makes a wry joke, and wants to be certain that a reader "hears" the ironic tone: ;). More and more variations on the basic smiley are being used on the Web today: search the Web for emoticon indexes.

12. Respect others' need for privacy

Online communication can quickly make you feel intimate with people who are relative strangers. Not everyone wishes to share details about themselves online. Be cautious when asking others for personal information about themselves. Keep in mind that different cultures have different expectations regarding what should be public, and what should be private, information.

13. DON'T CAPITALIZE EVERY WORD, AND BE JUDICIOUS WHEN USING EXCLAMATION POINTS!!!!!!

Capitalizing every word in a statement is the online equivalent of yelling. No one likes to be yelled at, so avoid capitalizing every letter in a posting. Likewise, there's really no reason to type in a dozen or more exclamation points.

A better way to emphasize words online uses an asterisk (*) immediately before and after the words you want to stress. Careful placement of these asterisks can communicate subtle differences of meaning. For example, compare the difference in these 3 statements:

- *I* said that we should all go to the course library for this assignment.
- I said that we should *all* go to the course library for this assignment.
- I said that we should all go to *the course library* for this assignment.

14. Ask clear questions

The Web is a great place for learning. The best way to learn is to participate actively, which includes asking questions whenever you are unclear about something or would like further information. The more details you include when posing a question, the more likely it is that you'll find a quick, directed answer.

15. Be patient, and be polite

Everyone online has a different level of technical experience or accessibility. Everyone online has a different level of familiarity with the language being spoken or the topic under consideration. Be polite and be patient with one another. Expect that there will be misunderstandings in online communication, and make every effort to resolve misunderstandings quickly and courteously.