

Engaging in Online Communication Guideline

Section 1 - Introduction

Purpose

(1) 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 learners. 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, and the provision of appropriate information can help to promote understanding and minimise conflict in online communication.

Scope

(2) This resource applies to all Hibernia College Staff, Faculty, Adjunct Faculty and learners when participating in any type of online communication.

Definitions

(3) 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.' Therefore, netiquette is the code of behaviour that underpins our participation in any type of online communication.

(4) 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

Standards of Behaviour and Professional Conduct for All

(5) All communications with Hibernia College, through any medium, are considered professional engagements rather than personal ones. Accordingly, all online communication should be treated as professional interactions.

(6) 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 questions (adapted from the Teaching Council's [Draft guidelines for registered teachers about the use of social media](#)):

- a. Might what I'm contributing reflect poorly on me, the College or a future employer?
- b. Who could see or hear my contribution?
- c. Am I confident that the contribution, if accessed by others (for example, peers, Tutors, College Staff), would be considered appropriate, reasonable and professional?
- d. Is the contribution for personal or professional reasons, and is it relevant to the context at hand?
- e. Could it be misunderstood? Could it offend?
- f. Is my contribution or communication accurate and an honest reflection of circumstances?

(7) Normal College regulations apply to communication, including exclusively online communication, as detailed in the [Student Charter](#), [Academic Integrity and Good Practice Policy](#) and [Establishing Overarching Standards for Student Conduct Policy](#).

Section 2 - 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 a 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 are working. Keep your audio muted in online classes, unless you wish to speak.
Social presence in online classes	Learners 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.

Section 3 - Guidelines for Online Collaboration for Academic Purposes

(8) Online collaboration is a meaningful way to build communities of practice in blended or fully online learning. Careful design and use of evidence-based practice can set Faculty, Adjunct Faculty and learners up for success in the online learning environment.

The following principles should be applied when using online collaboration:

- a. All collaboration should have a specific purpose, be aligned to module learning outcomes, where appropriate, and have a clear rationale and benefit for learners.
- b. Users should ensure they are posting to the correct forum and cross-posting should always be avoided.
- c. Availability and expectations for engagement should be clearly defined from the outset. Learners should be informed of the timeframes in which they can reasonably expect responses, and this should be inclusive of learners that are engaging in programmes in a fully online format.
- d. Urgent queries should not be posted to forums that do not have continuous monitoring. Upon programme commencement learners will be signposted to the range of student supports, for example pastoral or technical, so that learners can direct non-academic or urgent queries to the most appropriate .

Guidelines for Learners

(9) Learners should respond to posts and communication with their peers to demonstrate that they are engaged in active learning and with their programme.

(10) Learners should direct their peers to queries that have already been answered to promote collegiality.

(11) Learners 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.

(12) Where sensitive or personal queries arise Learners should use appropriate and private modes of communication to engage with staff, this includes email or phone, and should be directed to the correct email addresses as indicated in (8) d.

(13) The [3C&Q model](#) can be used to engage in collegiate and constructive discussions.

Guidelines for Faculty and Adjunct Faculty

(14) Faculty and Adjunct Faculty engaged in online provision or communication should model good behaviours and standards through early, appropriate and regular posting. This should provide examples of how to communicate, demonstrate that learner contributions and communications are received and read, and to ensure that discussions stay on track.

(15) If the number of learners participating in a collaborative discussion is high, encourage learners to answer each other's queries and to provide signposts to correct answers to allow for more targeted moderation.

(16) 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.

(17) If individual learners are not engaging, contact should be made using a more private mode of communication such as email or phone to check on learner engagement or progress. Equally, private modes of communication should be used to contact learners individually, and as early as possible, if negativity arises in a collaborative space.

(18) 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 learners 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.

(19) Where programme learning is taking place in a fully online mode Faculty and Adjunct Faculty should communicate with same frequency and communications should adhere to the same standards as communications with blended learners.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	5th March 2025
Review Date	5th March 2028
Approval Authority	Quality Assurance Officer
Approval Date	5th March 2025
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Enquiries Contact	Eoin Crossen Quality Assurance Administrator <hr/> Quality Assurance

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"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.' Therefore, netiquette is the code of behaviour that underpins our participation in any type of online communication.

"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.