Interacting online at university

Studying online does not mean that you are working in isolation. There are people on the other side of your screen, so the words you use and how you behave really does matter. Consider how you want to sound or appear to your tutors, other university staff and your peers, and think carefully before sending comments, unmuting your microphone and/or turning your video on. Here are some general guidelines and tips for communicating in the online space.

General guidelines for online interactions

- Find out how your tutor would like you to communicate with them online (e.g., email directly or post to online forum) - this may be explained in the introductory part of your course site (e.g., in the 'Welcome' or 'Getting started' section).
- Familiarise yourself with the online tools you are expected to use (e.g., Zoom, online discussion forum, etc.). Practise with classmates, look at guides or connect with IT Help if you need assistance.
- When interacting online, share your knowledge and ideas respectfully.
- Be inclusive by inviting others to contribute to the points you make if appropriate.
- Avoid dominating the conversation.
- If you disagree with what someone says and would like to express your position, do so respectfully and politely.
- Challenge ideas rather than the people offering the ideas - the aim should be to increase everyone's knowledge rather than put people down.
- Be cautious when using humour or sarcasm as this can get misinterpreted in an online environment - your joke may be taken seriously or seen as offensive.
- If you are new to participating online or unsure of how to contribute, start small by building on a point already made, agreeing with a viewpoint, asking for clarification or asking a question you have prepared ahead (if relevant to the discussion). Set yourself small goals to increase your participation over the study period.
- If you need to contact your tutor about something personal or confidential, do not raise it in the online space where everyone in the course can see. Contact your tutor via email instead.
- Always treat staff and peers with respect.

Additional guidelines for Zoom or virtual Classroom

- Find out from your tutor how you are expected to contribute and interact (e.g., video on/off, microphone on/off, use of chat function).
- If online video interactions are expected, consider the environment you are sitting in, what you are doing, and how you present yourself – be mindful that other people will be able to see you and your surroundings.
- Avoid creating disruptions to the online session if your video and microphone are enabled (e.g., be in a quiet space, minimise activity in the background, avoid eating, turn off your mobile phone, etc.). Consider muting your microphone when not speaking, to keep the collective noise to a minimum.
- Be prepared for the online session so that you can participate effectively (e.g., pre-reading, questions, contributions etc.).

Additional guidelines for online forums and chats

- Use clear and concise language.
- Check your language, grammar, punctuation and spelling before you post your comments. A poorly edited post may come across as careless.
- In the online space, many people will see what you type, so carefully check your words for tone and professionalism before posting a comment.
- Avoid slang or abbreviations (e.g., 'you' not 'u') to maintain professionalism.
- Avoid using the caps lock feature, AS IT CAN LOOK LIKE YOU ARE SHOUTING!

Additional guidelines for emailing

- Refer to the above guidelines regarding online forums and chats for advice on language use.
- Find out how staff would like to be addressed - when in doubt, use their proper title (e.g., Dr. Marks).
- Include a clear subject-heading that lets the recipient know what the topic is about
- Include a greeting at the beginning (e.g., Dear Dr. Marks,) and a salutation (e.g. Kind regards,). Avoid informal greetings like 'Hey'.
- Respond to emails in a timely manner.