# An etiquette primer for learners moving into online learning spaces

The move to online learning spaces is going to be new for many of our learners. Under the circumstances, it is best to provide a clear set of expectations for behavior when interacting and learning online.

To begin with, re-connect learners with the existing expectations that have been in place up to this point in the semester and remind them that those expectations continue to be in place. A change in delivery does not mean a change in respect for each other.

If expectations for communication have already been set and are outlined somewhere in the Brightspace shell, it is worth taking a moment to highlight those expectations again, with an announcement or a portion of an announcement.

If expectations have not already been established, it is a good idea to provide learners with guidelines for etiquette in an online learning space. There are at least three types of communication that may need to be addressed for individual courses:

e-mail,

discussion forums, and

Zoom conferencing.

## e-mail

All courses are likely to see an increase in e-mail traffic as a result of the changes that are taking place. Some of the following guidelines can be shared with learners in order to keep e-mail communication positive:

* Sending e-mail is not the same as sending a text message. Incomplete thoughts and messages cause confusion and more e-mails will need to be sent to get clarification. Also, response times are not as quick either. Do not expect an immediate reply to an e-mail.
* Meaningful subject lines improve communication. A good subject line would include the reason for sending the message, such “Questions about the group project.”
* It is polite to start an e-mail with a greeting, “Hi,” and to include a closing at the end “Thank you.”
* Take time to review e-mails for errors and for completeness. An e-mail is not like a phone conversation. Corrections cannot be made in real-time.
* It is better to send one, longer e-mail with all of the information, rather than a lot of short e-mails with one or two items in each.

## Discussion forums

Online discussion forums can be a useful addition to a course as a way to keep the conversation going about topics that learners are reviewing. If discussion forums are being added to a course, including some clear expectations in the description of each of the forums can keep the conversation proceeding smoothly. The following are some guidelines that can be shared with learners to set the expectations for discussion posts:

* Imagine you are talking to someone face-to-face when writing the post. Say “Hi” when starting and include some encouragement for others to participate in the conversation at the end: “What do you think?” or “Did I miss anything?” or “Are there other options that could work here?”
* Use a conversational tone without being too informal. Avoid text speak and other short forms that may not be familiar to everyone.
* Take time to review your message for errors and for completeness before hitting the “Post” button.
* Remember that the discussion forum is a public forum for all members of the class, and not a place for private conversations.
* Show respect for your classmates and their opinions when replying to posts and contributing your ideas to the conversation. The goal of the discussion forum is discovering new ideas and acquiring knowledge.

## Zoom conferencing

With the addition of Zoom as a communication tool to support learning, many of our learners may be experiencing this technology for the first time for both a one-on-one discussion as well as for large group discussions.

Not only is it helpful for faculty to share some resources on the use of Zoom with their learners, it is a good idea to highlight some etiquette tips for audio and video conferencing as well. The following guidelines can be posted in Brightspace shells for courses that will be making use of Zoom:

* Take the time to familiarize yourself with the Zoom interface and the way it works. It would be best if you have used Zoom once or twice before the first-class activity.
* Use the tools available in Zoom to control both your audio and video presence, especially in large groups. It will be easier for all participants if your audio is muted when you are not speaking.
* Remember that video calls are not the same as audio calls. You are on camera. Be thoughtful of your actions and your surroundings.
* Imagine that you are sitting in an actual room meeting with the people participating and behave accordingly. Minimise surrounding distractions when participating in a video meeting in order to keep yourself focused.
* Try to be on time when joining the session, especially if presentations are happening in real-time. Material from the beginning could be missed and that could cause you confusion throughout the session.

## Additional Resources

Below are some additional resources related to etiquette for online communication:

* Centre for Innovation in Teaching & Learning (CITL), Memorial University, "Netiquette - Instructional Resources," [Online]. Available: https://blog.citl.mun.ca/instructionalresources/courses/netiquette/. [Accessed 17 March 2020].
* P. T. Corrigan and C. H. McNabb, "Re: Your Recent Email to Your Professor," 16 April 2015. [Online]. Available: https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/04/16/advice-students-so-they-dont-sound-silly-emails-essay. [Accessed 17 March 2020].
* J. Dold, "Discussion Board Etiquette - YouTube," 15 February 2013. [Online]. Available: https://youtu.be/tVqWcrMPxfY. [Accessed 17 March 2020].
* Touro College, "15 Rules of Netiquette for Online Discussion Boards [INFOGRAPHIC]," 19 May 2014. [Online]. Available: http://blogs.onlineeducation.touro.edu/15-rules-netiquette-online-discussion-boards/. [Accessed 17 March 2020].
* S. Godin, "Zoom & Skype call tips (the secrets of video conferences) | Seth's Blog," 15 September 2018. [Online]. Available: https://seths.blog/2018/09/how-to-be-on-a-zoom-or-skype-call-the-secrets-of-video-conferences/. [Accessed 17 March 2020].