

moodle@biad policy on NETIQUETTE or internet etiquette.

Moodle Forums are intended to support your learning. You can deepen your understanding of your courses through discussion and share experiences and points of view. You can give and get help, and socialise and enjoy yourself.

Good communication in moodle@biad Forums is based on common sense, and the following simple rules govern all postings to moodle@biad. These guidelines in turn are governed by the UCE Network Acceptable Use Policy.

1: Thank, acknowledge and support people freely

"I liked your comment in..." "I agree with so and sos idea that..." "Thanks Sarah for that contribution. I got a lot out of it." "Welcome to the conference, Bill." In a computer conference you cannot see the other people nod their heads, smile, or otherwise indicate that they have heard what you said. If you don't receive an acknowledgement of a message, you may feel ignored, even when others have appreciated your contribution. This principle is particularly important when a group is set up as a support group, as it maintains the relationship necessary for people to feel supported. People know that they have been appreciated and are encouraged to contribute further. A note of caution: if everyone in a conference acknowledged everyone else's messages, the conference would be clogged with messages saying 'Thanks!'. Before acknowledging, check that there aren't already several similar messages.

2: Acknowledge before differing

"What I think you mean in essence is... Have I got that right? My own view differs as follows..." If you disagree with someone, start by briefly re-stating what the other person has said in your own words. The person then knows that you are trying to understand them, and is thus in a better position to take your view seriously. Otherwise, you risk a sequence of statements flying across each other with little mutual understanding or possibility of coming to agreement (even if it is agreement to differ).

3: Speak from your own perspective (or at least some specified perspective)

"Here's how I see it/how I feel about it/what I want to do." A commonly used abbreviation is IMHO, which means In My Humble Opinion, introduced for this purpose. Similarly, you can present other peoples views, with a direct quote and acknowledgement if possible. "As so and so said in XX..." "Official government views as given in... are..."

The most serious problems can occur when people speak in the impersonal, "This is the way it is..." "It is a fact that..." If no perspective is given, a statement may seem dogmatic or moralistic. If something is put as an

absolute, there is no room for anyone else's perspective. moodle@biad
Forums are there to encourage the exploration of peoples' points of view.

4: Avoid 'flaming spirals'

Sometimes someone will take offence at someone else's message, where no offence was intended, and reply angrily. The first person may then respond angrily again and so on, leading to an ever-increasing spiral of abuse. Without the usual cues of body language and facial expression, this can happen more easily in computer conferences than in face-to-face conversation. At times, this can seriously disrupt a conference.

The best solutions are for the people involved to affirm that they had not intended to offend and to show that they understand the other's point of view.

In extreme cases, people who persist in offensive or disruptive behaviour may lose Moodle user rights.

5: On emotions in messages:

Emotions can easily be misunderstood when you can't see faces or body language. People may not realise you are joking, being satirical or sarcastic. There are conventions for saying 'this is a joke' or expressing your feelings, which you may wish to use. They are called smileys or emoticons (look at them sideways) :-)

IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITAL LETTERS IT WILL COME OVER AS SHOUTING! Before sending an angry message, stop and take a break, then consider whether a milder tone wouldn't be better.

6: Quoting other messages when replying to them:

On the Internet there is a convention of quoting a few lines of someones message before commenting on it. You will often see this indicated by the > symbol at the beginning of each quoted line.

7: Where to write what:

Messages can be addressed to one or more individuals or to a conference (or to a combination of individuals and conferences).

If your reply to a conference message is meant for one person only (and is not of wider interest) send it as e-mail to that person only, rather than as a conference reply where everyone will see it. Within a conference it can be very annoying to have to wade through lots of little bits of private chat which hide the business of the conference. Before you send a message, check that it is addressed to the most appropriate place.

Keep to the subject of the conference. Don't go 'off topic'. If you want to add a different topic, just post a new message, which will start a new topic thread.

Avoid multiple answers to a message. Before sending a helpful reply to someone's question, check to be sure that someone else hasn't already said the same thing.

8: General style:

Keep messages short. Write concisely and try to avoid messages longer than one or two screens full. That helps people follow the flow of the discussion. If you have something longer to say, put it in a file which you create with your word processor and then attach it to a short message describing it.

All Messages have a subject line, indicating the contents of the message. People see this before they see the contents of your message and may use it to decide whether or not to read your message. Take the subject line seriously and make sure it is clear. When creating your own messages, be sure to enter a subject.

No advertising. This is an academic network, not the place to conduct your business. The Administrator will remove overt advertising.

Try to avoid the use of txt language, as it can exclude people whose first language is not English.

9: Legal issues:

If you are copying something written by someone else, put it in quotation marks and give them credit.

E-mail is generally considered to be private and should not be quoted without permission.

10: Would you say it to his/her face?

A conference is a public place, so be careful what you say to people. Although people are usually very tolerant (and you should be too), there are rare cases when someone sues for libel when they have been offended. Be especially careful about remarks which might offend minority groups or which might be considered obscene. Such comments have no place on an Electronic Campus, where the ethos is support and collaboration.

This document has been adapted from a Communications Guide prepared by Gary Alexander for of the Open University.

Reference:

Bob Zimmer and Gary Alexander, "The Rogerian Interface: For open, warm empathy in computer mediated collaborative learning", *Innovations in Education and Training International* , 33, 1 (1996), pp. 13-21, Kogan Page.