

Dos and Don'ts of Online Communication

To be effective, an online classroom must be a safe space where students feel their voices will be respected, supported and heard. Establishing clear guidelines for online interactions is a critical step in creating an online forum that will be successful long-term. A stronger in-class community will form as a result of establishing and maintaining a safe space in your online site.

Strategies for Creating and Maintaining a Safe Space:

- **Use each other's names.** Using a person's name when you respond to his/her postings creates a friendly online tone.
- **Read questions and conversational postings carefully** to avoid unnecessary confusion.
- **Compliment your peers** when they post strong responses or contribute original ideas to the conversation.
- **Ask questions.** If anything is unclear or you want further information or insight on a topic, just ask. If you have a question, there are probably other members of the group who are confused and need further clarification as well.
- **Be considerate.** Remember that your peers cannot see your body language or hear your tone of voice, so you need to keep your language direct and respectful.
- **Avoid slang, jargon, and sarcasm.**
- **Listen to all the ideas presented.** Remember there is no right or wrong in a discussion. A variety of perspectives add depth.
- **Stay open-minded.**
- **Respond instead of reacting.** Do not write a response if you are angry or upset. Instead, wait until you have had time to calm down and collect your thoughts.
- **Really read your peers responses.** Avoid skimming. Respect the time your peers have spent articulating their thoughts by reading carefully and thoughtfully.
- **Reread your messages before sending** them to ensure that your ideas are clearly communicated and supported.
- **Critique the content,** not the person.
- **Do not present your personal opinions as fact.** Back up your ideas with information to strengthen your statements.
- Courteously answer all questions addressed directly to you.
- **Make "I" statements when respectfully disagreeing.** Sharing an opposing opinion or idea is an important part of discussion, but it needs to be presented in constructive manner that encourages further discussion.
- **Do not use all caps** when writing. It is interpreted as yelling.
- **Avoid emotional punctuation,** like exclamation points, unless you are complimenting an idea shared.

Examples of Strong Sentence Starters:

Rebecca's comment made me think about....

Although Zach made a strong point that_____, I think....

I had not thought about Leigh's point that....
I respectfully disagree with Lawrence's assertion....
I really appreciate Deborah's insight into....
Thank you, Manuel, for sharing....
Great point, Angela! Have you considered...?
Even though Katie's point is valid, I tend to....
Building on Dustin's statement that....
In contrast to Michelle's point....
Brady highlighted some key ideas when he said...
Caitlin, can you clarify your statement that...?
Carmen, your posting reminded me of....