

# Online Etiquette- Engaging in Remote Learning

Centre for Irish Studies, NUI Galway

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Image: <https://omtglobal.com/6-lessons-transitioning-from-face-to-face-to-virtual-classroom/>

Things have changed a lot for everyone since March this year. Many of you were with us when we had to do our swift ‘pivot’ to remote teaching and learning in March 2020, and some of you may have experienced online learning through your schools before starting with us here at NUI Galway this September.

This semester we will be conducting most of our teaching remotely via the virtual learning environment called Blackboard (BB) at NUI Galway. One key feature of learning in this environment is that we will now be communicating with you primarily via our live teaching sessions, your NUI Galway email accounts, and via class announcements on BB.

While we are all getting the hang of teaching and learning in our virtual classrooms, a lot of our communication will have to be (for now at least) at a distance - either through video, microphone, or the written word. Because of this, the body language, voice tone and instantaneous feedback of the traditional classroom are all very different (or even absent at times) in our online learning environment.

All of these things need to be taken into consideration when you are contributing to a discussion and also when listening to or giving feedback online. Therefore, we ask to you by way of courtesy, to ensure the most positive learning experiences for all, to consider the following points:

1. **Be patient:** Be patient with yourself and with others. This is a new learning experience for many of us, and we will all help each other navigate it step by step, week by week, along the way. It will take time to get the hang of it all, but we’ll get there together!

2. **Always be considerate of your classmates** – not everyone has the same level of knowledge or experience. If you know more about a particular topic, use that knowledge to *encourage* others. Your classmates will appreciate it! Your responses to peers should expand on the ideas of others, ask questions, and enhance and expand the class discussion.

3. **Be an active listener:** Consider everything in relation to the discussion before contributing. This will help you avoid repeating something someone else has already contributed. Acknowledge the points made with which you agree and suggest alternatives for those with which you don't. Do not tell someone they are wrong, or make derogatory comments about them, simply because you do not agree with their interpretation (or they yours). All reasoned and well-informed points are valued and worthy of discussion.

4. **Be brief!** You want to be clear—and to articulate your point. Stay on point. Don't lose yourself, or your readers, in overly wordy sentences or paragraphs. Your points might be missed if hidden in a flood of text. Avoid going off-topic within a discussion. (This is a good tip for essay writing too!)

5. **Use a respectful writing style:** when posting comments in the webchat/comment box on Blackboard Collaborate/MS Teams or Zoom. Maintaining and supporting respectful discussions with regard to our engagement in an online educational platform are no different to respect that we like to demonstrate with face-to-face classroom settings. You are all really good at this already by the way!!

6. **Respect diversity:** It's an ethnically rich and diverse, multicultural world in which we live. Use no language that is—or that could be construed to be—offensive toward others. Racist, sexist, and heterosexist comments and jokes are unacceptable, as are derogatory and/or sarcastic comments and jokes directed at religious beliefs, dis/abilities, ethnicity and age. Generally, your personal religious and political beliefs have no place on an academic platform – unless your programme specifically requests them.

7. **Aim for *scholarly critique*, not criticism:** Critique should be constructive, well-meaning, informed and well-articulated. Rants directed at any other contributor are simply unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The same goes for profanity. The academic environment expects higher-order language and should be a place of respect for all.

8. **Be forgiving:** If someone states something that you find offensive, mention this directly to your module Lecturer. Remember that the person contributing to the discussion might be new to this form of communication. What you find offensive may quite possibly have been unintended and can best be cleared up by the Lecturer.

9. **Never email or post when ...** you're overly-tired, intoxicated, stressed or upset. Take a little time out, and consider what you wish to ask in your email/post. Check in with your Lecturer if you are unsure about something.

**10. Remember: You can't un-ring the bell.** Language is your only tool in an online environment. Be mindful. How others perceive you will be largely—as always—up to you. Once you've hit the send button, or pressed your mic, you've rung the bell.

If you are using Discussion Boards, review your written posts and responses to ensure that you've conveyed exactly what you intended. This is an excellent opportunity to practice your proofreading, revision, and rewriting skills—valuable assets in the professional world for which you are now preparing.

**Helpful Hint:** Read your post aloud before hitting the send button. This will tell you a lot about whether your tone is appropriate and your contribution clear or not.

### **Tone and Courtesy in Communicating and Writing Online**

- The "tone" is a very important part of electronic communication. When you read your message out loud, or speak into your microphone, does it sound the way you would speak to another student or colleague?
- Humour and sarcasm can be difficult to convey in text, so make sure everyone realizes when you are trying to be funny/sarcastic. It is easy for messages to be misinterpreted since there are no physical gestures or voice inflections that accompany the text. It may, in fact, be best to avoid humour or sarcasm as it can lead to misunderstandings.
- Think through and re-read your comments before you post them.
- Be nice. Refrain from inappropriate language and derogatory or personal attacks. Indeed, go the other direction, and applaud and say well done to your peers when they make a really good point!
- Make a personal commitment to learning about, understanding, and supporting your peers.
- Assume the best of others in the class and expect the best from them.
- Disagree with ideas, but avoid challenges that may be interpreted as a personal attack. Do not imply, infer or suggest that someone else's opinion is less valuable than yours.
- Be open to be challenged or confronted on your previously held ideas or prejudices. There are, after all, many ways of interpreting the same material, and the joy of learning is that we get to find out new ways of approaching things and learning something new we didn't think about or know about before.
- Encourage others to develop and share their ideas.