

# Being digital

## Communicating online

### 1: Introduction

There are many opportunities to interact with other people online, for example via social networks.

If you are a student, you may already be aware of the benefits, which include sharing useful information and learning from others. However, especially when you are communicating in writing rather than in real time, things can sometimes go wrong and misunderstandings arise.

How can you get the best out of the contact you have with others online, and what makes for a successful conversation?

### Learning outcome

By the end of this activity you should know the basics of good communication online.

## 2: Knowing the rules

The statements below provide guidelines for good communication. Read each one, and indicate which of the following situations they would be most appropriate to:

- both online and face-to-face communication
- online communication in particular
- face-to-face communication in particular.

### The statements

1. Present your opinions sensitively and acknowledge the other person's point of view, even if different to your own.
2. Smile and make eye-contact.
3. Don't fire off a hasty reply if someone sends you an email that upsets or annoys you.

(You will find the answers and feedback to this question in Appendix 1 on page 4.)

### 3: Getting it right

Guidelines for online behaviour are known as netiquette. The conventions are likely to vary depending on the context in which the communication is taking place. In some situations you may find it helpful to observe how others are interacting before launching in.

#### Think about

- **Who** you are communicating with - is it a friend, fellow student, colleague, or an official in an organisation?
- **Why** you are communicating - is your purpose to put forward your opinion, share information or find something out?
- **Where** the appropriate place to communicate is - via a forum, email, blog, social networking site or text message?
- **What** you say - online communications need to be appropriate to the context, clear, relevant, to the point and courteous.

#### Remember

- Treat others as you would want them to treat you.
- Learning to communicate effectively will enable you to reap the benefits of your online networks and help you to learn from others, whether for study, work or everyday life.

#### Putting it into practice

If you are an OU student and have not yet actively participated in an online forum, find a relevant one (for example, your module tutor group) and have a go at taking part.

### References

#### Being digital activity

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## Appendix 1: Answers and feedback

### Knowing the rules (page 2)

1. Present your opinions sensitively and acknowledge the other person's point of view, even if different to your own.

**Answer:** This would be appropriate to both online and face-to-face communication.

2. Smile and make eye-contact

**Answer:** This would be most appropriate to face-to-face communication

3. Don't fire off a hasty reply if someone sends you an email that upsets or annoys you

**Answer:** This would be most appropriate to online communication

### Feedback

When talking face-to-face with someone, you generally have non-verbal cues to help you judge how the conversation is going, for example, facial expression or body language. You will also be able to pick up from the other person's tone of voice how they are feeling. When communicating online, unless you are using some form of web conferencing such as Skype, you will not have these clues. It is therefore important to be polite, acknowledge the other person's point of view, and be aware of cultural differences and sensitivities. Keep in mind how you would like to be treated yourself and think carefully before you write.