Guide to Communicating In Online Classrooms

Communicating online for learning is different than communicating online for fun. When you communicate online, remember that you are relying on the written word, so you don't get to see a person's body language or hear the tone of their voice, which can lead to misunderstandings. This guide will help you navigate communicating in an online classroom.

When communicating online, it's important to:

- Consider what it means to be respectful online in a classroom setting.
- Consider who your audience is and what they need. For example, if your professor is grading a discussion post, they'll want you to use full sentences and cite your ideas because they are evaluating these skills. If you're chatting with classmates, they just need your ideas clearly and concisely.
- Consider how you're creating space for others to participate.
- Consider the purpose and intention of the message.
- Consider that others are doing the best they can – assume good intent.
- Consider that the classroom space is different than a social media space. Honor confidentiality within the online class.

Respectful Spaces

Like any classroom, online classes are communities. As a community member, you are expected to adhere to the values of our KPU community: respect, safety, civility, inclusiveness, and freedom from harassment and discrimination.

That means that we must balance academic freedom with creating a community where all students are welcome and included. For example: we would debate how KPU could better support international students but we wouldn't debate *whether* international students should be at KPU.

As part of your learning experience, you will be encouraged to take risks, but these risks must not be at the expense of others.

Security

Remember that your password is the only thing protecting you from pranks or more serious harm.

- Don't share your password with anyone.
- Change your password if you think someone else might know it.
- Always log out when you are finished using the system.
- Beware of phishing. Don't click on any link that you don't recognize.

Communication Tips

- Use clear and concise language**.**
- Ask your instructor how they would like to be addressed (Professor, Dr., Ms, etc) and share how you would like to be addressed.
- Use language that's appropriate to your purpose. For example, you might use emoji and slang in a chat with your group members, but that likely wouldn't be appropriate in a formal discussion post.
- Avoid using all caps, since this can be seen AS SHOUTING.
- Be cautious with the use of humour or sarcasm, since your tone can be lost, and your message might be misunderstood.

Sending Your Instructor an Email

Remember that your instructor's job is helping you to succeed. They want you to contact them. Communicating early and often is especially important in an online environment.

When emailing your instructor, remember:

- Have a clear subject line, so your instructor knows why you're writing.
- State what class and section you're in.
- When possible, give a specific question. For example, if you write, "I don't understand the homework," it will be hard for your instructor to give you useful advice. If you write, "I was confused about the length of the discussion post for this week," your instructor can be much more helpful.
- Even if your question is urgent, take a moment to read it before you send it to make sure it's clear.

Posting on a Discussion Board

When posting on the Discussion Board in your online class, you should:

- Make posts that are on topic and within the scope of the course material.
- Refer to the instructions to determine if you are all to respond on one thread or if there are groups or if each person posts a new thread.
- Review and edit your posts before sending.
- Always give proper credit when referencing or quoting another source (link to the citation guide).
- Be sure to read all messages in a thread before replying.
- Don't repeat someone else's post without adding something of your own to it.
- Avoid short, generic replies such as, "I agree." You should include why you agree or add to the previous point.
- When you disagree with someone, make sure to criticize the idea rather than the person. Before sending your post, imagine your classmate opening your message and reading it.