Mt. San Antonio College

Employee Guide to Online Etiquette

A Useful Guide for Civility Online

Digital communications, whether via e-mail or online using social media or talking or texting on a cell phone, are powerful tools to stay connected. As an employee of Mt. San Antonio College, you are expected to observe good online etiquette, or "netiquette," and remain professional at all times. Remember that just because you are telecommuting or working online and people cannot see you, you must still be professional and respectful as a representative of Mt. SAC. Here are some best practices for online etiquette. Always remember you must observe Board Policies and avoid harassing, cyberbullying, or disrespecting others. The same policies and rules of professional behavior apply while telecommuting.

Be Respectful: Everyone has opinions. Opinions can range from good to bad to crazy to just plain ridiculous. Respect other people's opinions, even if you do not agree with them. Before you respond, read out loud your response. If you wouldn't want someone to respond to you the same way, you are better off deleting the message and starting over. It won't be too late to improve your message until you hit "send."

Be Friendly: Before you hit "send," read your message again and think to yourself, "How would I feel if I received this message?" If the answer is upset or angry or insulted, then do not post or send the message. Delete it. Always remember there is another human being with feelings on the receiving end of your message.

Use Appropriate Language: Strong language, expletives, capital letters, exclamation marks, even unusual punctuation can easily be misinterpreted online. Say what you have written out loud. If it something you wouldn't want your children to hear, you should probably tone it down.

Use Humor and Sarcasm Cautiously: We all don't share the same sense of humor or the same views of life. What may seem like a funny joke to you may insult or enrage someone else. You may find yourself facing an EEO complaint. Think first, "Will everyone get the joke?" or "Is it really a joke if it is at someone else's expense?" If you won't say it to your child, don't say it at all.

Forgive and Forget: The online world can be very different from the offline world, so try to be understanding of others when they struggle with online communication. Don't mock people for using a wink instead of a smiley face. Don't ridicule anyone for misspelling a word of for incorrect punctuation. Chances are very good you have done the same. If it has, let it go and forget about it. Holding grudges is also poor online etiquette.

Avoid Using All Caps: IT'S LIKE SHOUTING! You should only capitalize individual words in a sentence to highlight or emphasize a point, not an entire sentence or paragraph.

Don't Rage Post or Text: Avoid responding when emotions are high. If you are angry or have a strong opinion about something someone has written or posted, wait until after you have calmed down to reply. Replying in anger is "flaming" and can lead to "flame-wars." No one ever wins a flame-war, and it usually gets you banned. As a Mt. SAC employee, flaming could be Board Policy or EEO violations. Yell at your monitor and vent if you need to, but don't let those emotions come through in your online communications.

Respect Intellectual Property: Be ethical, academically honest, and follow copyright laws. Cite ideas and quotes that you have used from other people, even in an e-mail message or post. Do not embed video clips to which you do not own the copyright.

Texting and Abbreviations: While using emoticons, emojis, and abbreviations when texting or chatting is acceptable, it is not for formal and academic communications. Do not expect everyone you communicate with will understand what :) or :~(or ROFLMAO, FYI, BTW, IMO, or LOL means. When communicating through Mt. SAC e-mail or posting to Mt. SAC's Facebook page or other social media outlets, use formal business writing.

Protect Your and Mt. SAC's Reputation: At home, when we go online especially to social media outlets or write and reply to e-mail messages, we often will share personal thoughts or opinions about anything and everything, including things that annoy us. When we personalize our online communications, we tend to forget about professionalism and use informal communication skills. While you telecommute and answer e-mails or use video chat for meetings, remember your audience will judge you as well as Mt. SAC for what you write, post, or say. Building a bad reputation is much easier than building a good one. Trust takes time to build, but one bad post or one moment of misbehavior while video chatting with students or the community can ruin your reputation as well as Mt. SAC's reputation.