

Behaveyourself.com: Online Manners Matter

Netiquette becomes a key part of education.

by [Laila Weir](#)
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From email to social networking to classroom blogs, today's students are online, both in and out of school -- a lot.

But there's no one out in cyberspace to make sure they wash behind their digital ears and refuse cookies from online strangers. Given this potentially dangerous void, schools will increasingly extend their supervisory reach, giving lessons at every grade level on netiquette -- call it Online Manners and Ethics 101.

Understanding how to interact online safely and effectively is, and will be, ever more critical. As today's students grow older, they'll be using the Internet to apply to colleges and jobs, and to communicate and network with colleagues. Yet our children, however much they seem to have been born with iPods growing out of their ears, haven't learned to handle digital communications by osmosis, any more than they innately knew how to write a résumé or hold a fork.

Educators have been increasingly, and sometimes uncomfortably, aware that students need education not just in Internet tools but also in Internet behavior. Given the more spectacular worries about online predators or identity theft, efforts so far have focused most on safety: [Virginia](#) [1] now requires Internet-safety lessons in public schools, and [Texas](#) [2] and [Illinois](#) [3] have passed laws encouraging them.

But forward-thinking educators are working to teach all-around netiquette. These nascent rules -- from acceptable-use policies created by school districts to guide students on the Internet to basic manners instructions for students with school email accounts -- have begun to show up in official documents. Some are written in legalese that no kid could follow, and probably no kid really reads. But some schools are making the information accessible to students -- for the children's protection as well as for their own.

"There are people who are realizing that online communication is the wave of the future," says Don Knezek, CEO of the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) [4] (ISTE). "And if our students are going to be prepared for the workplace, that's the way they're going to need to be able to communicate."

So what, exactly, is good netiquette? "A lot of it has to do with tone -- how you ask for things," says Shawn Morris, administrative coordinator of [Wichita eSchool](#) [5], a virtual public school in Wichita, Kansas, that reviews netiquette dos and don'ts with students. No "SHOUTING" and avoiding IM-speak in formal messages are among the most common guidelines. (See "[Don't Even Think About It: The Basics of Netiquette](#) [6]," below, and "[Beyond Emily: Post-ing Etiquette](#) [7].")

Good online communication is especially important in virtual schools, where most interaction happens digitally. But with the Internet an ever-larger part of most students' lives, brick-and-mortar schools from Longmont, Colorado, to Modesto, California, are starting to teach netiquette, too.

Efforts to teach these skills to students are still spotty, though, as education blogger (and George Lucas Educational Foundation advisory board member) Will Richardson points out. "A lot of schools are beginning to put in Internet-safety and Internet-etiquette units," he says. "But they're not systemic in any way, and they really need to be."

Both Richardson and Julie Evans, CEO of the education nonprofit organization [Project Tomorrow](#) [8], say schools

must incorporate netiquette better into everyday education. "Rather than having it be, 'We're all going to troop down to the computer lab and learn Internet matters,' embed it into the regular classroom experience," Evans argues. "When we're using collaborative tools in the classroom, instruct right along with them."

Living up to that ideal will take time and training as teachers themselves get more comfortable with digital tools. But whatever form it takes in the immediate future, netiquette training will -- and must -- expand.

Don't Even Think About It: The Basics of Netiquette

Forward-thinking schools make netiquette the student's Internet hall pass. Here are some of the basics:

- Don't SHOUT in all caps.
- Remember: The person on the other end of a digital communication can't see your expression or hear your tone of voice.
- Cool off before responding to messages in anger.
- Check messages for misspellings or misstatements.
- Respect others' privacy and your own (for example, don't give your number to that new MySpace friend).
- Use a clear and understandable email subject line.
- Adjust your tone and style to the situation (for example, don't use IM-speak or all lowercase letters in an internship application).
- Don't forward private messages to people they weren't intended for or copy others on replies to personal messages.
- Remember: Email is never really private and a copy may exist in cyberspace . . . forever.

Read [more detailed guidelines](#) [7] from teachers, schools, and school districts.

-- LW

Source URL: <http://www.edutopia.org/whats-next-2008-netiquette-guidelines>

Links:

[1] <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Technology/OET/internet-safety-guidelines.shtml>

[2] <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/imet/intersafe/educators/index.html>

[3] <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=095-0509>

[4] <http://www.iste.org>

[5] <http://eschool.usd259.org>

[6] <http://www.edutopia.org/whats-next-2008-netiquette-guidelines#sidebar>

[7] <http://www.edutopia.org/netiquette-guidelines>

[8] <http://tomorrow.org>

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