“Netiquette” Suggestions for Mid-Pandemic Online Education

It is pretty safe to say that by the time someone seeks advanced training in psychoanalysis they know the basics for how to act in a classroom or seminar. Now that the corona virus has forced psychoanalytic education online those “rules of the road” are not so clear. But whether onsite or online, faculty and students need to feel safe and comfortable enough to fully participate in the potentials of the learning community. When learning online, everyone has more responsibility to nurture and protect the experience of both teachers and learners. Proper “netiquette” helps.

Adding to last week’s suggestions to enhance teaching and learning in online psychoanalytic education, APsaA’s Covid-19 Advisory Team, working with the Distance Education Study Group, has put together a basic list of netiquette tips. We hope the following suggestions will get us off to a good start in making classes and seminars run smoothly.

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Netiquette for “synchronous” (all online at the same time) interactions like a Zoom class

— Maintain a sense of professionalism. Please come to class fully dressed and groomed, alert and upright. Avoid unintentionally communicating disrespect by lying down in bed or on a sofa. Do your best to be on time. But understand that Covid-19 conditions can interfere with best intentions.

— Don’t distract the teacher(s) and other students with stimuli specific to your location. A phone ringing, or a text pinging, is even more distracting than it would be in an onsite class. Avoid eating, even if you might have done so in an onsite class, because online the noise and movement can be very distracting. Find a location that is free of external noise such as a television or other people talking. During COVID-19 optimal conditions can be difficult to achieve, so please use a headset if necessary to minimize distractions.

— Create conditions so you can maintain focus. This includes eliminating distractions from other screens. Even when on “mute” do not engage in conversations with people like family members who are not in the online classroom. Try to separate yourself as much as possible from being distracted by others clamoring for your attention, but forgive the occasional intrusion from a child (or pet) in need. And never check, initiate or respond to personal emails or texts during class.

— Protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants in the class or seminar. Please make sure that no-one is inadvertently in the room with you at home. If you need to be where others can hear what is going on, please use headphones.
— As much as possible avoid getting up from your seat and disappearing from the screen. If you have to get up to attend to a domestic issue, find an unobtrusive way to excuse yourself, like posting a short text in chat.

— Try to avoid a possible tendency to monopolize the class; to speak in a way that is brusque, or even rude or hostile; or to respond to every comment as if it were a two person conversation.

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Netiquette for “asynchronous” (all online at different times) interactions like message boards and online Discussion Forums

— Only post comments that are relevant to the question or topic being discussed. Read all messages in a thread before replying. If your system allows it, start a new thread or channel if you want to raise a new issue. If using email, make your replies relevant to the Subject line. To raise something new, do not just change the Subject line. Create an entirely new email.

— Avoid misunderstandings and communicate respect by using full sentences and proper punctuation and grammar.

— Proofread and edit what you write before sending or posting.

— Give appropriate credit when referencing or quoting someone else or a specific source.

— Respect the views of other participants. Remember what you write will be read by friends and colleagues!

— Don’t use all caps in posts. This is considered to be shouting in an online environment and it feels rude.

— Avoid wasting people’s time with short, uninformative replies like “yup” or “I agree.”

— Never ever make ad hominem arguments. Personal, disrespectful comments have no place in online communications.

— Be judicious in the use of emojis and abbreviations. They frequently lead to misunderstandings. In learning communities like ours they are frequently used to signal cyber-fluency rather than communicate relevant information. It can look like “showing-off.”

— Beware of online humor. Participants may have the best of intentions, but it is not always possible to convey the spirit of a harmless joke on a message board. And online sarcasm frequently (usually) backfires.
— Don’t over-interpret online silence. Better to assume a benevolent motivation, like being too busy or maybe not even seeing the post, when someone does not reply in a timely fashion.

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We are all in this together!

We hope that learners and teachers can expand on this. We’ve already received useful links from the Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research. You can access them here: www.psychoanalysis.columbia.edu/covid-19/zoom-etiquette-trainees. Please add your suggestions on the web-form at https://forms.gle/TaETx9mUdcaugSGg8. We know the learning experience is different online, but we can work together to make it worthwhile.

Thank you in advance, and here’s to a good year teaching and learning online.