

Online Survival Skills and Professional Behaviors for CCI Graduate Students

Courtesy and respect for others should underlie all professional interactions, both in person and online. The absence of face-to-face contact in asynchronous distance learning suggests particular guidelines for professional behavior in this environment. The following general guidelines for online interactions have been adopted by CCI for students pursuing any of its graduate programs.

Take responsibility for your own learning. In graduate school, you are expected to be in charge of your learning. This means reading all course materials carefully, following directions, maintaining communication with your instructors as appropriate, participating actively in online assignments, managing your workload to meet deadlines, etc.

Remember that an “A” is not automatic. Different instructors have different expectations, but all expect you to earn your final grade through a considerable amount of work. Graduate courses are often quite different from undergraduate ones, and the quality of the work is generally expected to be higher.

Read course materials and follow directions. Course materials and discussion boards are instructors’ primary way of communicating with you. Course materials include almost all you’ll need to know about your courses, and discussion boards contain information about changes or questions that arise along the way. If you have questions, your first step is to double-check these two areas for the answers. Of course, you should contact your instructors if you’re still puzzled, but looking your course documents and discussion boards first will usually get you answers more quickly.

Maintain communication with your instructors. Opportunities for regular communication are built into online courses. However, if something in your life interferes with your ability to participate in your classes, communicate with your instructors so that they can try to help you resolve problems. Don’t “disappear” from a course for extended periods of time.

Participate actively. Online features like discussion boards and wikis are designed to help you do just that. Take advantage of all the opportunities that are offered for discussion and reflection. Grades are often attached to these activities to encourage your active participation, but their real value is in what they add to your own academic growth.

Be timely and to the point. Everyone is pressed for time, and waiting for a response to a question is stressful for other students and for instructors trying to orchestrate lectures and assignments. Limit messages to one topic at a time so that important ideas do not get lost in email or discussion-board exchanges. Don’t wait until the last minute to submit assignments: technical glitches happen!

Remember that tone is easily misinterpreted. The absence of facial expressions and body language can mask irony or make a “joke” seem like an insult. Use emoticons to signal your intent to be ironic, funny, or anything other than straightforward. When tempted to judge another’s statement an insult, consider the possibility that he or she has a sense of humor that’s different from yours and that the statement represents humor gone awry.

Respect others’ privacy. Sometimes, private information slips into messages. Be careful not to forward your fellow students’ messages without their approval.

Respect others’ ideas, opinions, and feelings. Each of us is unique, and working online increases the

need to take into account the wide variety of students in CCI's graduate programs. "Flaming," ranting, writing cutting remarks, and making derogatory or inappropriate comments about anyone for any reason are unacceptable.

Respect others' work and learning styles. Meeting deadlines is your responsibility, and planning your work accordingly is an important skill. Especially when you work in a group, it's critical to schedule your time so that you don't inconvenience others: leaving everything to the last minute is a disservice to your group, as is trying to force others to meet your own scheduling preferences.

Use evaluation forms to promote improved teaching and learning. Your input is vital for maintaining and improving the quality of CCI courses. Be sure to use this important forum for making reasoned, professional responses rather than diluting your effectiveness by demeaning fellow students or instructors in unprofessional ways.

Use correct English grammar, spelling, and usage. Writing comments and papers for your courses requires formal—not informal—English. Of course, we all make mistakes in our writing from time to time; but professional standards rather than the looser writing we use in email, texting, etc., apply to your coursework.