

## CHAPTER 9:

# The Online World

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*As we sort out the many technical details around the Internet, it is easy to neglect important issues regarding Internet culture and “Netiquette.” It’s not just an interesting aside—this information will save you time and trouble as you venture into this strange new place. The Internet is truly a “cross-cultural experience.”*

## Internet Culture

Internet culture is an amazing example of volunteerism. These days, a lot of people hesitate to stop on the highway to help someone with a flat tire, but folks are stopping all the time on the information superhighway. Everyone contributes; everyone gains. You can find interesting people from all over the world who have similar jobs, hobbies, or passions—professionals, academics, colleagues, and just regular nice people who will often freely give of their time and knowledge.

It’s not simply that you can get free information and advice—you can also contribute. Those in national service programs can contribute experience and energy to the Internet community as well as their local communities.

## Netiquette

Though the Internet is a wonderful resource for communication, certain limitations are imposed by the technology. For example, most communication happens through simple text, without the benefit of body language, voice inflection, or even fonts with boldface or italics. In addition, since many people are paying for their Internet access or struggling to use their computer—and since we are all busy—there are standard practices to show consideration to your fellow travelers on the information superhighway.

### E-Mail Netiquette

E-mail is quick, easy, and efficient. For interactions with trusted colleagues, it is common to zap messages, complete with misspellings and bad grammar. It’s content that counts. E-mail can be too easy, though. Remember that once a message leaves your computer, it

cannot be retrieved or recalled. If you follow these basic guidelines, especially when participating in listservs, you will have no regrets.

**Don't CAPITALIZE to emphasize.** It's considered shouting. As you use e-mail, you'll find that these conventions become intuitive.

**Be careful with humor.** It can be misunderstood. Remember, other people are only seeing your words. They might not know you are just being facetious. Emoticons (a set of symbols created by certain characters on the keyboard which represent various emotions) are used to add tone to e-mail text. For example, many people use a sideways happy face—a colon, dash and right parenthesis—to indicate humor (see the sidebar).

## **Listserv Netiquette**

**Create short, appropriate subject lines.** This practice is especially important when you e-mail a discussion group. Some people get lots of e-mail and sort things out by subject line.

**Quote sparingly.** Depending on how you access e-mail, you can reply to messages by simply hitting a button. The text of the message being answered is often included in your new message. Delete most of the old message and summarize the point you are responding to in one or two sentences.

**Double check the addressee before sending e-mail.** Using the Reply function can sometimes be hazardous—a response meant for an individual on a listserv can easily be sent to the entire group by accident.

**Save directions to a listserv.** When you subscribe to a listserv, you are automatically e-mailed directions on how to participate. These directions include important information about finding another subscriber or unsubscribing from the listserv. Save this welcome message—you will need these instructions down the road.

**Listen before posting.** You are part of a conversation. If you are just signing on to a listserv, it's important to respectfully listen before posting.

**Don't respond to "flaming."** Making negative and personal comments on a listserv is called flaming. Avoid wasting valuable time responding to flames. Also, be aware that some folks intentionally forge e-mail addresses and say inappropriate things simply for a reaction.

**Be nice to “newbies.”** Whether you know a lot or are just learning, you start seeing folks who inadvertently violate these rules. Find considerate ways to help them.

## **Netiquette and the World Wide Web**

For organizations creating home pages on the web, it is important to consider the range of software and equipment that people will be using to access your site. Considerately designed websites can be intelligibly viewed with a variety of browsers, as well as in text mode. Since many of the agencies with which you want to collaborate may not have the most up-to-date equipment, this is not just good Netiquette, but good sense.

## **Corporation Policies**

As with other innovative technologies, the Corporation for National and Community Service encourages its programs and sponsors to take advantage of the extensive resources and networking opportunities offered by the Internet. When using the Internet, however, keep in mind that the same Corporation laws and policies on prohibited activities apply to the Internet as they do with anything else that is identified as or affiliated with a Corporation-funded program or activity. The Corporation has neither the desire nor the capability to censor program activities on the Internet. Nevertheless, all programs should adhere to the Corporation's laws and policies on prohibited activities when using the Internet.

As you embark on your journey through cyberspace, keep in mind this rule of thumb: If, as a Corporation-funded program, you are not allowed to engage in a particular activity, whether in person or through another medium (e.g., written material, over the phone), you should not engage in such activity on the Internet. By the same token, any activity that you engage in as a private citizen not affiliated with the Corporation or a Corporation-funded program can be engaged in on the Internet, on your own time and at your own initiative, as a private citizen not affiliated with the Corporation or a Corporation-funded program.

As a reminder, when using language and images that identify your program or yourself as being affiliated with the Corporation (e.g., logos for Learn and Serve America, AmeriCorps, and National Senior Service Corps), activities such as the following are prohibited:

- Any effort to influence legislation, such as organizing letter-writing campaigns or petitions to Congress or other lawmaking entities
- Organizing, promoting, or participating in rallies, boycotts, strikes, demonstrations, political campaigns, or voter registration drives
- Printing, distributing, or displaying politically charged writings or images
- Assisting with, promoting, or deterring union organizing
- Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements
- Engaging in religious instruction or any form of religious proselytization
- Providing direct benefit to a for-profit entity, a labor union, a partisan political organization, a religious organization, or a non-profit entity that fails to comply with laws restricting political activities by 501(c)(3) entities

The above applies to any activity in which you would be identified as a Corporation-funded program. For example, you could not post a politically charged message on your program's home page featuring a Corporation program logo or name, such as AmeriCorps. It is crucial that you keep these guidelines in mind when using the Internet as a Corporation-funded program. None of the above, of course, is to be construed as preventing national service participants and program staff from exercising their right as private citizens to engage in the above activities on their own time and at their own initiative.

If you have any questions regarding prohibited activities, please contact the Office of the General Counsel, (202) 606-5000.