

## Columbia Theological Seminary

# Netiquette Guidelines for Online Discussions

### BE COMMITTED

- *Post messages with substance that add to the discussion.* Follow-up posts should be more substantial than “I agree” or “good point” without stating why. For example, follow-up posts might do one of the following:
  - Augment one of your fellow group members' posts
  - Challenge a point made by another classmate in a gracious manner
  - Pose a further question for discussion
  - Draw connections between ideas and posts within the discussion
  - Make observations about the group's collective engagement with the question.
- *Check posts frequently.* Read posts and comment several times during the discussion period. Our classroom is online, and you are learning with each other. Commit yourself to dialogue, to teaching, and to learning throughout the course.
- *Write only after you have thought about what to write.* You may want to compose your post(s) in another document so you can proofread them before pasting them into the discussion. This may also help you avoid retyping a post if your browser crashes.

### BE COURTEOUS

- Respect others at all times, even if you disagree or don't understand. Remember, you are communicating with a human being, not a computer.
- Don't *post* in anger or frustration. Try to avoid ALL CAPS BECAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE YELLING.

### BE CLEAR

- Write so others can understand you. Problems with spelling, grammar, and punctuation can make that hard to do. Informal writing is fine, but remember UR not texting!
- Write at least as well as you speak. It's okay to write in your own voice, but it may help to read your post out loud before you send it, to be sure it makes sense.
- Be specific. If referencing a previous post, cite the person and cite the part of the post which you are addressing.

### BE CONCISE

- Say enough to articulate what you mean, and no more. Readers often skim or skip anything longer than one or two paragraphs. If your post is too long and makes several points, consider breaking it into multiple posts.
- Economy of words: Avoid “puffy” writing or overuse of church/faith language. This is an academic setting and even though we are considering matters of faith, comments should be concise and focused.

### BE COURAGEOUS

- It is okay to express disagreement. A respectful debate can advance our learning and sharpen our understanding of a topic.
- All learning is disruptive in some sense; to learn, we must disrupt the preconceived notions that we bring to the course. If we have the same ideas at the end of the course as at the beginning, can we truly say that learning occurred?

### BE CAUTIOUS

- If in doubt, leave it out. Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. Humor and sarcasm are not always clear in online posts.
- Emoticons may help but limit their use. Also, avoid any language that might be construed as insensitive or inflammatory.