

Netiquette for Online English Assistants.

This “Netiquette” form provides some basic guidelines for conducting oneself in an online classroom when assisting as Teaching Assistant (TA).

1. Above all else please always remember that this is an academic environment and that you, as the aid to the instructor, must always remain calm, considerate, polite, supportive, and non-confrontational in any correspondences with students (or with the instructor of record): this even if the students might at times be agitated, inconsiderate, impolite, or even confrontational in their communications with you. If students ever *are* such in their communications with you, inform the instructor of record immediately.
2. Be professional. In any course, online or in person, students are learning more than whatever is the content of the course: they are learning how to communicate in professional or academic environments. So: be the model from which they can learn how to communicate in a calm, kind, professional, and appropriate way.
3. Note that humor can often be a useful tool when trying to teach, or to get students to buy-into a critique you might be offering, but tone is *very difficult* to express and control in any written communication; and what tone you intend to express can often be read and interpreted in ways other than you intend. Always be cautious and hesitant about “joking” with students as what you intend as a “joke” can inadvertently be read as an insult.
4. In discussions and other course correspondences, always write in a way that models good grammar, spelling, punctuation use, and all-around sentence structure. Write in complete sentences. Proofread your writing before posting or sharing it with students (edit it afterward if you notice typos). Students will learn by watching you what good clear writing looks like.
5. Never use vulgarities or slang when communicating with students (or with the instructor of record). Communicate using the language you normally use when in a professional environment.
6. Depending on what the instructor of record has you assisting with, this may or may not factor into your TA experience but: if the instructor of record assigns you the task of providing any written feedback to the students, be conscientious about not offering *too much* feedback. Pointing out many or every issue in a piece of writing is counter-productive. Too many comments and too many grammar corrections, for example, become difficult for students to process and often overwhelm them. Instead, when critiquing writing, try to focus on pointing out and suggesting ways to address just a few “big” issues you see in the writing. Don’t mark up every little thing. In this way students might step-by-step find their way to becoming better writers.
6. Depending on what the instructor of record has you assisting with, this may or may not factor into your TA experience but: never, when responding to a student’s opinion, idea or thesis, outright tell the student that they’re *wrong*. Much of what the students do in any English course involves interpretation, and much of what we’re attempting to do in any English course is get students to explore their opinions and ideas, and then consider how their interpretations can be supported by (or countered by) sources of various sorts. This process of exploration will result in students expressing positions or ideas that might seem silly, specious, ridiculous, even disturbing; but telling students they’re *wrong* will embarrass them and make them hesitant to

continue exploring and expressing their ideas. Instead, if the instructor of record has given you some responsibility for critiquing the students' presentation of ideas (such as critiquing a draft of an essay), stick to critiquing the way the student goes about expressing a thesis and supporting the thesis with support. If, for example, they are using absurd sources to try to support an absurd premise, instead of telling them that their premise is absurd, ask questions that will get the students to critically reflect upon the quality and validity of the sources they're using. It's not your (our anyone's) job to change the way anyone else thinks. Ultimately we need to always *respect* differences in the ways different students see the world: as long as those expressions in the class or essays don't become vulgar, sexist, or harassing.

7. If a student expresses vulgar, sexist, or harassing language or behavior of any sort (including hate-speech) whether to you, to another student, or just in general, do not respond or engage. Instead, immediately inform the instructor of record. Handling any such situation is 100% the responsibility of the instructor of record and TAs should *never* engage in any such situation where anything even remotely close to sexist, vulgar, or other harassing language or behavior has emerged.

8. Be aware that Mercy College is a diverse institution with students of all ages, from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, of all political affiliations and religious beliefs, and that these differences often emerge in class discussions and writings. Be respectful of difference in your communications. And again, if you see anything that you perceive to be moving beyond the threshold of difference and entering the zone of offense, do not engage or reply, but instead contact the instructor of record.

9. Keep all communications with students *visible* and "on the record" whether in the form of discussion posts, emails, or comments/critiques on drafts/documents you send to the students (if the instructor of record has you doing that). *Never* speak on the phone with students or communicate with students in a way that goes beyond the parameters of the classroom environment. Never conduct a live synchronous session or be a part of such a session if the instructor of record is not present. Always consult the instructor of record if you have any questions about this (or about anything else related to communicating with or assisting students within the class).

10. Know that if you ever have any questions or concerns about any of this, and/or about your TA role of the sort that you feel you cannot express to the instructor of record, you can and should immediately contact the English Director or the Chair of the Department of Literature and Language. The Chair and Director are your advocates.

FINAL NOTE:

While we carefully vet our applicants, and don't foresee ever having to do this, we reserve the right to remove a TA from the online classroom at any time for any reason if and as determined by the instructor of record, the Program Director, or the Department Chair.

Please sign indicating that you have read and agree to adhere to the netiquette policy described in this document:

Name

Signature

Date