

Tone and communication

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



In face-to-face communication, meaning is conveyed not only through words but also through tone of voice and body language (facial expressions, hand gestures, etc.). As a result, listeners pay more attention to our tone and body language than to our word choices in order to derive additional clues to our meaning.

Challenges of Online Communication

One of the challenges of communicating online is that we must depend entirely on words to convey meaning. For example, we do not have the opportunity to reinforce our intention to be positive and encouraging with a smile or a nod. Without the accompanying tone or body language, people can misconstrue the meaning of the message. Consequently, written communicators need to carefully choose their words to avoid any negativity or misunderstanding. A careless joke can flop, or an offhand comment can come back to haunt us.

Visual Enhancements in Written Communication

Written communication does not allow for visual cues (such as raised eyebrows to denote surprise) or verbal cues (such as voice inflections to denote emphasis). However, this medium does allow for a unique dynamic: the ability to convey tone through writing. The words we choose, the format in which we present them, and visual enhancements - such as italics, color, font size, and emoticons :-)) all convey the tone of messages.

The Importance of Tone in Written Communication

Tone in writing provides the reader with an indication of how the writer feels about the subject matter, as well as about the audience. In online communication, it is necessary for our tone to be professional and direct, yet natural and unforced. We want others to know that we have given thoughtful consideration to the subject matter. We also want the tone to come across as open and welcoming of further comments and responses from our

colleagues. Below are some tips to consider when writing messages for the online environment:

- Keep the intended audience in mind. Personalize your message for a particular audience. Use appropriate greetings in your messages, reference specific comments posted by your classmates or by the instructor, and direct questions to the class as a whole, as well as to specific individuals.
- Use a natural, conversational style of writing. Do not force your writing to be overly formal and rigid. Read your writing aloud to determine how your words might come across to the reader.
- Use a clear, direct approach to writing. Avoid technical or stuffy language, and write with simpler, more concise sentences. Avoid the passive voice, and include explicit words and directions.
- Reference course materials and/or your own experiences when possible. Relate your writing to the objectives of the course, and personalize it with information based on your experience.
- Use emoticons when appropriate to reinforce humor, whimsy, disappointment, etc. However, avoid overusing emoticons in place of fully explaining the meaning of your statements.
- Carefully choose your font size and color, as well as your message format. Using a bright pink font may not convey a professional tone as much as a standard black or navy font would. In addition, very large fonts or the use of all caps might make your message seem shouting and accusatory.
- Take advantage of the asynchronous aspect of the OLS software. Though you will need to compose many messages, you will not always need to post them immediately. In fact, you may decide to compose messages in another application like Microsoft® Word first, and then copy-and-paste the text into your OLS posts. Doing so allows you to save messages and review them later to provide a better perspective on the

tone of a particular note. Stop and consider these questions before posting any new message: Is it respectful, courteous, professional, and constructive? Read it aloud. Would you be comfortable saying the words in a face-to-face conversation? Make any changes you deem necessary to improve the tone before sending the message. By carefully crafting our messages, including appropriate visual enhancements, and being mindful of our tone, we can become more successful written communicators. Internet Etiquette or “Netiquette” All media have both limitations and advantages. One of the most common concerns people voice about using an email medium is the challenge of being limited to the written word. On the other hand, this medium also allows writers time to think before committing themselves to a statement that might be perceived as incorrect or insensitive. Just as our society has rules of conduct governing interactions in the face-to-face environment, the virtual community also has rules of conduct for electronic interactions. You are, no doubt, familiar with the word etiquette—in the online environment, we use the term netiquette. We can enhance and improve both face-to-face and virtual communications in a number of ways. In addition to the content of the message itself, effective communicators in face-to-face interactions are attentive to both tone of voice and body language (as in visual cues). We also need to be attentive to those areas in our virtual interactions. Although we are not in the face-to-face environment, we need to be mindful of the tone of our messages (“ Respond to me as soon as possible” sets a different tone than “ Please respond to me as soon as possible.”), as well as their visual appearance (“ PLEASE CALL ME,” in all caps, is viewed differently than “ Please call me,” in letter case type).