

CONFERENCING GROUND RULES

Along with the opportunity to build a special type of community, computer conferences pose unique problems related to standards of behavior. Conferences require special efforts to help them thrive. Because electronic communication lacks the benefits of body language and facial expression, it's easy to misunderstand and to be misunderstood. The guidelines suggested here discuss what participants can do to make the conference fun and useful for current and future members. If you have any suggestions or ideas to improve these guidelines, please enter a response to this item.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

A computer conference brings together participants from many diverse backgrounds and experiences. A conference is a place where all opinions should be treated with respect. Making a conference a place where people feel comfortable sharing and discussing ideas takes a special effort on the part of all participants.

ETIQUETTE

We hope this conference can be friendly and informal, yet also provide ample room for serious discussion. Therefore:

- Don't be too concerned with spelling and grammar-- yours or anyone else's. Do be sure that your meaning is clear.
- Written communication can be more prone to misinterpretation than verbal communication because of the lack of cues and signals that we have come to rely on to understand a person's meaning. So be careful how you use sarcasm and irony; they're particularly difficult to convey electronically! Many participants use "funny faces" to indicate tone, such as:
:-) or ;-)
- (Tip your head to the left. The first is just a grin, the second a wink.)
- If you have a new idea, start a new item! Try to keep existing discussions on track. New items produce more good discussion.

COMPUTING CENTER POLICY

Although direct harassment of others is not common in most conferences, it can happen. Please be aware of the Computing Center's policy governing use of computing resources. Enter VIEW *CONDITIONSOFUSE at the DO NEXT? prompt to see a copy on your screen, or pick up _QuickNote: Conditions of Use Policy_, Reference R1103 at a Campus Computing Site. If you are the target of harassment or discrimination, please contact one of the organizers immediately.

PSEUDONYMS

Register as a participant using your real name. In some conferences participants may want to use a pseudonym for an item or response to protect their privacy. However, in some course conferences instructors may require that you do not make pseudonymous responses. Please honor their request.

Any name or phrase makes an appropriate pseudonym EXCEPT the name of a real person. Please respect the name chosen for a pseudo, and refrain from making an entry with another person's chosen "nom de plume."

OPINIONS, ARGUMENTS, AND DISAGREEMENTS

A conference is a great place to express ideas and opinions, and to debate different points of view. Discussions are much more interesting if they focus on issues and not people, use information to develop arguments, and don't get so heated that responses might be interpreted as personal attacks. Reviewing a response before entering it can help avoid unintentional offensiveness, especially in a controversial item.

When you are reading other people's entries, it can be easy to misinterpret a response and take it as a personal attack, especially without the visual cues that we have come to rely on in face-to-face conversation. The old rule, "count to ten" before you take offense is wise advice in electronic communication. Sometimes it's useful to wait and see how another participant reacts to a situation before you respond.

If you feel you are the target of an attack, try to avoid escalating it in the conference. Instead, try to clarify or diffuse the situation in a message with the person, or contact the organizer.

MAKING ENTRIES

Make the main point, question or issue of your item clear. If you are entering a long item, it helps to include "View Remaining Text" options every 20 lines (place two equal signs (==) in the first two positions of a line). Be as succinct as possible. Use descriptive headers for your items.

PRINTING OUT CONFERENCE MATERIAL

Participants are generally welcome to print out conference material for their own use. We ask that printed material not be given to non-participants, unless permission has been sought of and granted by the authors of the item(s) and response(s) involved. You may want to start an item to discuss this issue in your conference.

Happy Conferencing!