**Ground rules – General**

1. **Be respectful**

We are a highly diverse university. Your classmates are likely to have cultural backgrounds that are different to yours. Try to be open minded and learn from one another. Never critique people’s traditions, beliefs or ways of life.

We’re also proud to be a multi-lingual university. When you communicate with classmates, remember to use language that everyone can understand (try to avoid colloquial language). Be aware that English may be a second language for many.

Always assume good intentions when reading someone’s Forum post. Think: how would this comment sound if it was spoken by someone with a smile instead of written?

1. **Help each other learn**

When you offer help about course content, don’t give the answer straight away but instead help the other person to find the answer themselves. For instance, you can ask:

* You say you don’t understand X – could you tell me what part of X you do understand?
* What do you mean by…?
* Could you put your question in different words?
* What will the answer help you do?
* (paraphrase question)….do I understand your question correctly?
* Do you know what information you need to find the answer/solution?
* Let me give you a hint: it is related to….

It’s ok to explain things to the other person if they are really stuck. You ultimately have a duty to explain to others things that you understand and they don’t.

1. **Be present**

You need to show your presence online several times a week. There are various ways you can do this, for instance through posting questions or comments on a forum, attending the Blackboard Collaborate chat with the lecturer, or going into the student break-out room.

Check your University email at least once a day.

Try to interact with others on a personal a level as you can – these are the people you will be studying with for the next few years and you will meet them face to face next year.

Put as much effort in as you can for every individual and group task.

**How to communicate with your peers**

**On a forum**

1. Always be respectful in tone. In a discussion you may disagree with the other person’s ideas, but you need to do so in a way that values the other person’s ideas, too. Remember also that everyone’s background is unique and they may be used to different ways of thinking than you. Try to use every conversation as a learning opportunity. No question is ever stupid.
2. On the course you are in each other’s “Zone of Proximal Development”. This means that sometimes another person understands things just a bit more than you do, and sometimes it’s the other way around. You can therefore help each other. When it’s you who understands things better than the other person, you have a duty to explain it to them. But don’t give them the answer straight away. First, make sure that you understand what it is they’re asking. If you’re not sure, ask them if they can put it in different words. Then, try to put yourself in their shoes and think back to what you did to understand this particular thing. Then based on that you can give them either a hint for where to look, or you can ask them a question that will help them further. Only when they are really stuck you can give them the actual answer, but this is the last resort. Try to make the other person think as much as possible.
3. Re-read your message before you post it. Is is clear and unambiguous? Does it convey the tone you want to convey? It is ok to use emoji’s to help make your tone clearer, e.g., to convey humour.

**By email**

1. All the ground rules for ‘Forum’ apply to email as well.
2. Respond as quickly as you can, ideally within 48 hours.
3. Save the other person’s email address so it doesn’t go into your junk folder
4. Remember to check who is included in the address list; sometimes you need to ‘reply all’ to make sure everyone receives your reply. This is especially important when collaborating on presentations or other tasks where you are creating a joint product.

**Using the Blackboard Collaborate video rooms**

1. Ground rules 1 and 2 for ‘Forum’ apply to the video rooms as well.
2. Make sure you are in an appropriate place; people will see where you are, whether this is a room or outdoors. If there are other people present in your house, make sure they are aware that you are doing a video conference, as they may not wish to be seen.
3. Don’t comment on other people’s appearance, either positively or negatively.
4. Talking over video conferencing may not come naturally to everyone. Some people choose to have their video turned off and have only a microphone. Respect this decision.
5. Give other people space to talk; if you have lots of questions for the lecturer, an email to them directly may be better. If you’re in a student-only forum, try to avoid doing most of the talking and instead find out how other people are getting on.

**How to communicate with staff**

**On a forum**

1. Always be respectful in tone. Use the name and title they wish to be addressed as. Remember that your tutors and lecturers are real people with backgrounds as varied as yours.
2. When discussing coursework, try not to ask for ‘the answer’ – try to ask for help in finding the answer yourself. It’s ok to ask for help more than once.
3. Re-read your message before you post it. Is is clear and unambiguous? Does it convey the tone you want to convey? It is ok to use emoji’s to help make your tone clearer, e.g., to convey humour.

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5. Give other people space to talk; if you have lots of questions for the lecturer, an email to them directly may be better. Respect the lecturer’s choice of student’s question time; if the group is large they may suggest you “put your hand up” (this is a feature in BB Collaborate), instead of just speaking straight away, or they may ask you to post your question using the text facility.