

Fact sheet

Netiquette for online classes

A guide for online teaching

What is this fact sheet about?

This fact sheet provides helpful tips and hints around the key (behavioural) rules of online instruction. The ZLLF offers a range of compact courses for lecturers seeking guidance on the didactics of online education.

The basics:

A shared set of rules promotes collaboration between students or participants in continuing education programmes and lecturers during online classes. Ideally, the parties define these rules together in the first session of the course. There should be as few as possible but cover all the relevant aspects: a limited set of rules is easier to follow. Kick off all subsequent classes with a brief reminder of these rules, e.g., by showing a slide with a related visual. Not all HSLU lecturers set up the same rules, so this will help students and participants to keep track of what they are for this specific course.

1. Mutual respect

The fact that your interlocutor does not sit directly in front, beside or behind you in an online class does not mean that it is any less important to treat them with respect. Notably, this includes being polite, to let others finish and to actively engage with the class as a teacher. Ultimately, people are expected to behave exactly as they would in an in-person classroom setting.

This includes being seated at your desk or dining table (as opposed to the sofa) and showing good manners (i.e., no breakfast on the side) during class.

2. Be prepared, on time and there for all to see

Online instruction requires the same level of preparation as in-person classes: you need to lay out the course materials and open the files you are going to use. You don't want to be distracted by having to look for them. You should always sign in ahead of time using your proper first and last name and check both your mic and webcam to make sure others can see and address you.

3. Minimise distractions

To follow online classes without being distracted, you should find yourself a quiet and private space, close your email and chat software, mute your mobile and organise your screen. This allows you to focus, to take notes, and leaves space to display the other participants next to the shared presentation.

4. When to switch the webcam on and off

Attending online classes while staring at rows of black tiles is tiring for everybody involved. However, long online sessions with the webcam running may leave participants feeling watched. As a lecturer, establish rules around when webcams may be turned off (e.g., when a document is being shared on the screen) and when it must be switched on (e.g., at the beginning and end of the event, during plenary segments, during

group work). Discuss these rules with your students and diligently enforce them. Tell them they may use virtual backgrounds if they prefer not to share footage of their private environment and hide self-view if they don't want to see themselves on screen all the time.

5. Use the microphone wisely

To avoid background noise, only switch on the microphone if you want to speak and always switch it off again afterwards. Most people will know this, but it's good to be reminded occasionally. You should not blanket-mute all participants when they join the session; it's patronising and makes it impossible for them to greet you and each other. If you notice background noise coming from a participant without them noticing, tell them or, if necessary, quickly sort it out yourself.

6. Active participation—engage and ask questions

Lecturers prefer active participants, both online and in-person. To be able to engage and to motivate others to do so, everybody must know the rules of conduct. Can the participants just throw in their questions, do they have to announce them (online) or should they write them in the chat section? And will it be answered straight away or after the segment has concluded? Will you, as a lecturer, be in charge of moderating the chat section or should you assign (alternating) members of your class with the task? Any way will do as long it aligns with your personal preferences. Pick your preferred modus operandi and communicate it to the participants. Tell them to keep it short, concise, but always friendly in the chat. Use a motivating feature at the start of a session to let the participants know that the event is interactive.

7. Respect privacy and data protection law

Participants in online events have the right to their own image and must give prior consent to being recorded while attending the event. This includes screenshots showing participants, video and audio footage and chat excerpts. Online classes are course-related events delivered by the HSLU and therefore protected learning spaces to which third parties have no access.

8. Time management

Online instruction is more tiring than in-person classes. Regular breaks are therefore important. Define and communicate break times early and transparently. After the break, it is advisable to log back in a minute early as a lecturer to set a good example.

9. And, finally...

To teach online classes, you should pick a private, suitable workspace that is well-lit from behind. Use a separate (not in-built) webcam. Make sure to stick to your own rules, particularly when it comes to organising two screens with all the necessary programme windows. Close all non-essential communication software to avoid getting distracted by incoming messages. Make sure to always look into the webcam to establish eye contact when teaching online classes and to address the participants by name. Their logging in with their first and last names will help you with that.

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