



Introduction to Digital Citizenship

1.1 What is digital citizenship?

Digital citizenship refers to the responsible use of technology to learn, create and participate online. As a member of the University of Edinburgh community, it's your social responsibility to be a good digital citizen, which means treating others with dignity and respect in both physical and virtual spaces. The following principles are a good place to start:

1. Use the Golden Rule

How we behave in virtual spaces shouldn't differ from how we behave in physical spaces. It's important to act with empathy, compassion and kindness in both your online and offline interactions.

2. Respect differences

The University prides itself on fostering a truly international community, which means respecting cultural differences and honouring diverse perspectives. If you disagree with someone online, engage thoughtfully and avoid personal attacks.

3. Pause before posting

The internet is a place of knowledge exchange, but conversations can get heated. It's worth pausing for a moment before responding to anything in anger. Avoid posting or sending anything that could hurt someone else, damage someone's reputation or that of the University, or threaten either your own safety or the safety of others.

4. Stand up for yourself and others

If you ever feel unsafe online, tell someone. You can also support others who are targets of online abuse or cruelty by reporting activity that threatens a person's safety and preserving evidence of inappropriate or unsafe behaviour.

Watch: "[What is digital citizenship?](#)" (1m17s, Digital Citizenship by Oliver Schinkten, [LinkedIn Learning](#))

1.2 Why is digital citizenship important?

The University of Edinburgh is an international community that prides itself on our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. We have a duty to one another to build a community that works for everyone both online and off. The concept of digital citizenship underpins each of the four key themes in the University's Strategy 2030.

People

The University's Strategy 2030 states, "We will set an example for others by conducting ourselves with integrity, transparency, honesty and clarity at all times. We will always value and protect freedom of expression, while respecting the boundaries dictated by law, decency, ethics and respect for others." The same applies to both physical and digital spaces.

Research

The ways in which we manage and store research data constitute an important digital safety and citizenship consideration. Being "critically aware of the ethical, legal and regulatory responsibilities of research," as the Strategy 2030 states, means storing data safely and effectively.

Teaching and Learning

Creating a sense of digital citizenship is key to improving student satisfaction and wellbeing. In line with the University's commitment to widening participation, we have a duty to offer accessible and responsive educational services that ensure students from any background feel safe and supported whether studying on campus or online.

Social and Civic Responsibility

Information security is a key part of the University's social and civic responsibility. In order to "ensure that our actions and activities deliver positive change locally, regionally and globally," we must start by creating an online community committed to making the internet a safer, more inclusive space.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Online

The University is fully committed to fostering safe and inclusive spaces both across campus and online. Unfortunately, the internet was not created with equality, diversity and inclusion in mind, meaning we all have to make a conscious effort to promote these values and protect the most vulnerable members of our diverse and international community. Watch the video below, "Making the Internet a Safer Place" for an introduction to the concept of cyber hate and how you can do your part to make our online community safer for everyone.

Watch: ["Making the Internet A Safer Place"](#) (12m46s, Pete Burnap TEDx via YouTube)

Respect at Edinburgh Hub + Consent Collective

The [Respect at Edinburgh web hub](#) brings together information and guidance on the Dignity & Respect policy, the processes for raising and addressing concerns, and the support and training available. You can find up-to-date information on the University's #NoExcuse campaign and the Students' Association's Liberation campaigns in the Respect at Edinburgh hub as well.

[The Consent Collective](#) is also working with the University to address issues surrounding consent, sex, gender, sexual harassment and relationships. You can access their content by signing in to Consent Collective TV using your university email address.

1.3 Understanding misconduct

The University has a zero-tolerance stance towards any form of harassment or bullying, including online misconduct. Examples of online harassment include but are not limited to:

- Offensive language, racism and hate speech
- Sexual harassment, including sexualised bullying and unwanted sexualisation
- Intimate image abuse or revenge porn
- Doxing – publishing someone’s personal details online without their consent
- Engaging in a cybermob or dogpiling – ganging up on someone in mass criticism
- Message bombing – intentionally flooding a user’s online accounts with messages meant to limit or block their access to an operating system or platform
- Failure to safeguard personal or confidential information
- Trolling – purposely saying something controversial in order to get a rise out of other users
- Orbiting – staying in someone's social media by liking and engaging with their posts without ever reaching out for a genuine chat
- Cyberstalking – using social media to harass, intimidate or frighten someone
- Hacking – seeking to compromise digital devices or networks
- Online impersonation

The [Online Harassment Field Manual](#) offers a comprehensive glossary of terms relating to online harassment and misconduct.

Student Code of Conduct

If you’re at all in doubt about what kinds of behaviour are strictly prohibited for members of the University community, Section 12 of the [Student Code of Conduct](#) (pp.4-5) provides a list of examples pertaining to both physical and virtual spaces. Please bear in mind that, as per the Code of Conduct, which applies to all students, the University may choose to investigate and take action on any reports of misconduct occurring online and in social media.

The Student Code of Conduct should be read alongside the University’s [Dignity and Respect Policy](#), [Trans Equality Policy](#), and [Computing Regulations](#) for a holistic view of expectations for student digital behavior.

Virtual Classroom Policy

In addition to the Student Code of Conduct, it is crucial to take into consideration the University's [Virtual Classroom Policy](#), which clarifies rights and responsibilities when delivering and recording teaching and learning using online communication and collaboration technologies. The policy covers a number of very important areas such as intellectual property, data protection and appropriate use of recordings. It complements the [lecture recording policy](#) and is based on the same principles.

1.4 Online Etiquette and Expectations for Engagement

As a student, you'll use multiple online and digital communication technologies throughout your studies. Email, discussion boards, Microsoft Teams, and Blackboard Collaborate are just some of the tools you'll use to interact with your tutors and fellow students. It's important to remember that the same expectations for how you conduct yourself as a member of the University community apply to both physical and digital spaces, even outside the virtual classroom.

As a starting point for online engagement, consider the following:

1. Treat all participants with dignity and respect. Support your fellow students as you want to be supported, even if your opinions differ.
2. Be polite, professional and inclusive. Address people as they wish to be addressed.
3. Use clear and concise language. Be respectful of each other's time and attention.
4. Check your spelling and grammar but don't chastise anyone for their mistakes. Remember that your fellow students might be anywhere in the world and English may not be everyone's first language.
5. Use standard fonts optimised for online reading (sans serif, 12-14 pt. font).
6. Avoid typing in capitals as this may be interpreted as shouting.
7. Be careful with humour and sarcasm – not everything is clear when conveyed through text so it's important to minimise chances for misinterpretation.
8. Be mindful of sharing personal information online – both yours and others'.

The following resources offer more information on netiquette for your online studies:

- [The Digital Student: Netiquette \(University of Hull\)](#)
- [Online Communication \(Oxford Brookes University\)](#)
- [Checklist: Being an effective online learner \(Enhancement Themes\)](#)

Social Media Guidance for Students

Social media can be a powerful tool for sharing your thoughts both within and outside of your studies. In our hybrid learning and teaching environment, forums such as blogs and groups will only become more important.

While many courses will have dedicated social media spaces administered by course organisers, class reps or other moderators, it's also important to consider your conduct when engaging with social media in a non-University context. **Inclusivity, privacy and academic integrity** are all crucial points to consider in any kind of online engagement.

Regardless of whether you're engaging with a University-owned social media account or a personal one, it's important to **think twice before posting**. Consider the **impact** of your post on the wider community and ask yourself if your words may have unintended consequences for yourself or others in terms of **privacy, reputation, or physical safety**. Remember that even if there is no ill intention, certain language can cause harm to others.

Creating safe and inclusive environments on social media is everyone's responsibility. This means being **allies** and **active bystanders** online and showing support for those who are targeted by online abuse. Please refer to your **School's guidance** on social media use for further information on expectations and guidelines for students.

1.5 Useful Resources

[Digital Citizenship online course](#) (LinkedIn Learning, 1h31m)

This LinkedIn Learning course takes you through what it means to be a good digital citizen and how to use technology appropriately and respectfully to build community online. Visit the [Digital Skills LinkedIn Learning page](#) for more information on how to set up your free LinkedIn Learning account.

[Becoming a Digital Citizen: an Introduction to the Digital Society](#) (FutureLearn, 9 hours)

This three-week MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) from the University of York provides insight into being a digital citizen and an opportunity to engage with debate about what is appropriate in the world of social media.

[Educate Yourself: Online Racial Equity Workshops](#) (Eventbrite)

This collection of online events curated by Eventbrite aims to provide a platform for events and conversations centering on racial justice and equity. Check out the events listed and learn more about what you can do to stand for a more equitable society both online and off.

[Dealing with Online Racism](#) (BBC Own It)

This web hub offers helpful resources on managing your mental health and reporting offensive content if you have been affected by racism online.

[The Empower Project: Supporting Communities to End Gender Based Violence](#)

This local Edinburgh charity is committed to supporting communities to end gender based violence with a focus on online abuse in the digital age. Check out their website for more information on upcoming events and workshops.

[Stop Online Abuse](#)

This website offers a range of information on online abuse and harassment with particular resources on sexism, homophobia and biphobia, and transphobia.

[The LGBTQ+ Guide to Online Safety](#)

This online guide offers a range of guidance for LGBTQ+ individuals and allies, from finding community online to navigating cyberbullying on social media.

[Recognising and Reporting Disability Hate Crime](#) (Scope)

This online guide offers helpful information on recognizing and reporting disability hate crime including a range of support resources.

[Zen and the Art of Making Tech Work for You](#) (Tactical Technology Collective)

This bilingual manual sourced from a community of women, activists and technologists offers a virtual library of information devoted to strengthening and protecting your online presence and creating safe and collaborative online spaces.

[Online Harassment Field Manual](#) (Pen America)

This digital toolkit contains effective strategies and resources that writers, journalists, their allies and their employers can use to defend against cyber hate and fight online abuse.

[“You’re Not Powerless in the Face of Online Harassment”](#) (Harvard Business Review)

This article by Viktorya Vilks of Pen America outlines concrete steps you can take to defend yourself and others in the face of online harassment.

For further information, resources and guidance on digital safety at the University of Edinburgh, please visit our [Digital Safety and Citizenship web hub](#).

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