

## **Communication Guidelines**

Although interaction will be different than in a typical classroom setting, it is a key component of online education. Whether you communicate through e-mail, chat sessions, or the forum, you should do so politely following the guidelines given. Weekly written discussions amongst your classmates and instructor will take place in a forum. A forum is a place to carry on a discussion with others. Instead of merely e-mailing thoughts to an individual, a forum provides a public place for you to post your thoughts so that everyone can read them and have the opportunity to respond. One of the advantages of this type of communication is that participants do not have to all be online at the same time. Replies to a post can be added right after it is made or even days later. These discussions will build throughout the week and provide opportunity for you to ask questions, clarify understanding of a topic and offer suggestions to others. Students will also have the ability to communicate through e-mail and chat sessions. All types of communication should work together to help build a community where learners support and assist each other. All students should feel safe to share their thoughts. Keeping this in mind, the following are guidelines that will help us build this supportive learning environment.

## **General Guidelines and Format**

Be concise. Each assignment will give a minimum and/or maximum number of words. Stay within those guidelines.

Use correct grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. Use spell check and edit all postings before submitting. Treat forum posts and e-mails with the same respect and guidelines that you would use when writing

correspondence or handwritten letters. It is not a text message and text message shorthand is not allowed. Refrain from using abbreviations.

Using ALL CAPS is not appropriate. It is the equivalent of shouting.

Break long messages down into short paragraphs so they will be easy to read online.

For longer messages, be sure to compose your message first in a word processor such as WordPad. When you write messages in the text box of a discussion forum, it is not recognized by the software your internet service provider (ISP) uses to connect you to the internet. As such, after a set amount of time, your ISP will "time out". Your connection may be broken, and your work may be lost. (Note: Please do not copy and paste directly from MS Word as extra html code will be added to your post, and it will be difficult for others to read.)

## **Content**

Clearly state your topic in the subject line.

Your contribution should demonstrate original thought and grapple with pertinent issues with respect to the topic.

Be sure to carefully read the discussion questions. If the question has several parts, be sure to answer all parts of the question.

Only messages that are relevant, help others, further the conversation, or resolve an issue should be posted.

Ask expansive questions to stimulate your classmates thinking and lead to deeper understanding.

Build on previous posts by agreeing or disagreeing, but avoid posting "Me, too" or "Great job" type posts. Give specific reasons or examples about why you agree or disagree with the post. Ask questions or define issues or terms in the post.

Include personal accounts and provide reasons or examples to support any assertion you make.

Suggest metaphors that could help with understanding.

Share web links and other reference materials.

Cite the source for anything you quote as part of an assignment by providing the pertinent information.

## **Ownership**

Online communication cannot be copied and/or shared without permission of the author and/or the instructor. Make sure that you have permission before using any other student's work. CEF and CMI reserve the right to use students' online posts without consent for educational, marketing and/or communication purposes.

## **Online Etiquette**

Be polite. Do not belittle others or their ideas.

If you disagree with someone, start by restating what he/she has said to see if you understood correctly. You may question and challenge other people's ideas. When done constructively, it benefits learning. Keep in mind that individual attacks and verbal abuse are not allowed.

Use good judgment in your postings. What you may think is humorous; another person may think is offensive. Avoid sarcasm and be careful with humor. It can easily be misunderstood online due to the lack of verbal and nonverbal clues.

If you use a word that may have several meanings, define the word and clarify the intention of its use.

Profanity, pornography, hate and offensive language are not allowed in any online communication. Forums will be actively monitored and messages deleted as necessary.

## **Chat Sessions**

Chat sessions allow participants to discuss topics in real time on the web. This is a useful way to get a different understanding of the topic being discussed.

Be on time. Give yourself enough time before the chat session starts to troubleshoot technical difficulties so that you are not late for class.

Dial-up connections are not recommended since it may make the chat room very slow.

Research the topic of discussion before the chat starts. Make sure you have

paper, textbooks, and any other research material available to refer to for support of your ideas.

Make sure the chat has your full attention.

If you have a question for your group or for the instructor, please type a question mark (?).

Include the name of the person to whom you are responding before you type your message.

Be patient. Some people type slow or have dial-up issues. Give the receiver time to process the information and formulate a response.

Stay focused on the goals and objectives of the chat.

When you have a lot to say, please type three dots (...), so that the rest of the class knows to hold all other postings until you have completed your thoughts.

Emoticons (e.g. smiley face) are useful when the words you are typing may be taken two ways.

Expect the unexpected. If you have technical problems, don't panic. Email your instructor as soon as possible and ask how you can make up for your absence.

## **Inclusion**

Be aware that *CMI* students represent a variety of denominations and cultures. *CEF* and *CMI* are inter-denominational. All denominations, national origins, genders, ages and races should feel welcome. Keep a multicultural, inclusive perspective when writing online. Any posts that are considered offensive to individuals or groups are subject to deletion by your instructor. Students will be required to resubmit their post making necessary changes. If the student submits their subsequent post after the assignment deadline, the student will receive a reduction in grade for late posting. Any student who consistently posts things that are offensive or hurtful to others is subject to dismissal from the program without remuneration.

## **Personal Security**

Neither *CEF* nor *CMI* will ask you to send personal information via unsecured email, through the *CMI* Online forum or other unsecured communication. As well, do not reveal personal information to other students. Notify the *CMI* Online Administrator immediately if anyone requests information such as home address, Social Security number, driver's license number, credit card numbers, account numbers, or password. Do not request this information from others.

## **Privacy**

If you draw examples from people in your area, protect their confidentiality by using fictitious names.

Assume that all messages you post are available to the general public. Do not post things that you want to keep private.

Do not post any proprietary, classified, or restricted information.

## **Advertising**

Advertisements are strictly prohibited. Do not post to the forum or e-mail students promoting yourself, your organization, your company or your products. Sales, chain letters, advertisements and commercial activities are forbidden.

## **Intellectual Honesty and Academic Misconduct**

The *Children's Ministries Institute* expects students to exhibit honesty in all areas of study and life. Academic dishonesty is a serious violation of the standards of the *Children's Ministries Institute* and can result in denial of credit without remuneration and dismissal from the Institute. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism\*, cheating, fabrication of research (inventing data or citations), the facilitation of academic dishonesty, or violation of copyright. All *Children's Ministries Institute* content is subject to U.S. Copyright laws and is restricted to use by enrolled students. Books and notes (in print or downloadable form) as well as CDs and DVDs may not be reproduced in any form, shared in print or by electronic means, or sold without the written permission of the publisher. The only copying allowed is that which the student is required to make in order to complete his or her course. Streamed video lectures that are part of a full course should not be viewed on a regular basis by those not enrolled in the class. In addition, students should not attempt to gain unauthorized access to computerized academic or administrative records or systems. Any act of software piracy, hacking, constructing viruses, or knowingly introducing viruses into a system will be breaches of integrity.

\*All written material submitted by any means should be the original work of the student. Group projects should be the combined original work of the group. Students should not at any time represent another's work as their own.