



Guide to communicating with your peers on social media

Social media and instant messaging platforms like Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp offer a convenient way of staying in touch with your classmates and supporting each other through your studies. Here are some issues to be aware of when using these platforms to communicate with peers:

Privacy: Be aware that what you post online may be shared publicly, or with others that you hadn't intended to share with. Information can be circulated much more widely than you imagine, and can have far-reaching effects. Before you post, ask yourself how you would feel if your parents, your lecturers, or your future employers (for example) were to access what you have shared. Protect your own privacy and that of others and **think before you post!**

Longevity: Remember that information posted online **can linger for many years** after it has been posted – and even if you think that you have deleted posts that you would rather forget, they can often still be found somewhere in cyberspace. A lot of employers really do look at social media profiles when assessing potential employees, so again – think before you post.

Sensitivity: Personal information about a person's health, appearance, family background, income, address, and so on is often considered 'sensitive' and should **not be shared with others online** without the express permission of the person concerned. Sharing or commenting on sensitive information about others on an online platform is an absolute no-no.

Respect: Be respectful in your language towards and about others. Before you post online about a classmate, lecturer, or tutor (for example), ask yourself if you would be comfortable with that person reading what you have written or seeing the image that you have shared. Online platforms can be a great way to 'let off steam', but sometimes people post material online that they would never dream of saying out loud. Be careful not to make racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise **offensive or hurtful**



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comments. The NUI Galway student code of conduct (<http://www.nuigalway.ie/codeofconduct/>) applies in cyberspace too.

Plagiarism: It's great to share study-related ideas, information, and tips, but do ensure that you are aware of and observing the **rules on plagiarism** (see <http://www.nuigalway.ie/plagiarism/>).

Availability: It's OK to **turn off the phone sometimes!** You don't have to be in constant contact with everyone on social media. Give yourself a break and switch your phone to silent for alerts, schedule some phone 'downtime' into your day, use apps to block social media for periods of time, and/or switch it off or leave it in a different room at night. Don't neglect real-life contact with your peers.

Anxiety is contagious: Being in constant contact with your classmates – especially around more stressful periods, such as when an assignment is due or exams are looming – can increase your own stress levels. If everyone is beginning to panic, it may be best to **switch off** until the hysteria is over.

Don't believe everything that you hear on social media platforms – if in doubt, **check in** with a course director, academic advisor, class rep, mentor, lecturer, tutor, or course administrator.

Bullying and harassment: Sadly, bullying and harassment can be a feature of online life. If you feel that you are being bullied or harassed online, take action. If the platform that you are using permits reporting or blocking a user, make use of these functions. Take screenshots of any offensive or hurtful posts and, if you can't resolve the issue informally, consider discussing your options with the Students' Union and/or the Gardaí. See also NUI Galway's anti-bullying policy, available at

http://www.nuigalway.ie/administration_services/equality/documents/student_anti_bullying_policy_and_procedures.pdf

See also the **Digital identity** content in the **IT and digital skills** section of the Academic Skills Hub.

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