



## Guiding Students in Using Technology Appropriately—Suggestions for Your Syllabus

Instructors and their students sometimes differ in their understanding of appropriate etiquette when using newer communications technologies. If you are not quite satisfied with the way students use email, laptops, and cell phones in your class, we offer several ways to help your students learn what you consider acceptable uses of those technologies. We also include some sample language for you to adapt for your syllabi to describe your expectations to students.

### Email

Both at Princeton and nationally, more and more instructors report that students send them inappropriate or ill-conceived emails—using language that’s too informal, not addressing the instructor respectfully, or even in the worse cases, using unseemly phrases. One recent study showed that a significant improvement in the quality of student email was attained by just a two-minute training on its use in class.\* You may want to take an opportunity in class and/or in your syllabus to instruct students about your preferred email etiquette and explain to them why formal practices may be expected in business and professional situations. Here’s one example for possible use in your syllabus:

*“Email communication with the instructors in this class should be considered formal, similar to other business-style email correspondence. Your email should address your instructor by title and name (Professor Smith, Mr. Jones) unless instructed otherwise. Please restrict your email correspondence to issues of class business and questions that are not answered on the syllabus. Please use appropriate capitalization, spell out words completely, and sign your complete name. I will usually be able to answer your emails within \_\_ hours [except on weekends]. I typically will not respond to email between \_\_ PM and \_\_ AM. Privacy issues prevent me from discussing grades via email. If you have substantive questions about course content, please see me during office hours when we can talk more productively.”*

### Laptops

The issue of students’ use of laptops in the classroom is a complex one that we have dealt with in more detail in another tip-sheet (*Dealing with Laptops in the Classroom*). We suggest that you consider innovative ways to engage students in lecture that divert them from the seductive lure of the computer or ask them to use the computer in pedagogically useful ways. You do have the right to ask students not to use laptops in the classroom if you feel it generally distracts the class (students with certain disabilities may pose the exception to this statement). Although some students do indeed take notes on laptops, this kind of note taking may be more akin to dictation and not allow the processing of ideas that can occur when students take handwritten notes. Below are examples of ways to talk about student use of laptops in your syllabus:

*“Classroom sessions are an important opportunity for you to extend your learning beyond your reading or work on assignments. Thus I consider it important that you engage with the ideas presented in class during class. Because laptops often pose a distraction for you and those around you, I ask that you do not use laptops in this class” OR “...I ask that you refrain from checking email or recreational use of the internet during class and restrict your laptop activities to note taking or looking up items pertinent to class discussion.”*

If you don't list repercussions of students' not adhering to your request, you should be ready to decide how to deal with those students who ignore these instructions and who distract other students by doing so. Reminding students of your policy periodically may be helpful as well.

### **Cell Phones and Hand-held Wireless Devices**

Proper use of cell phones has been a topic of discussion for some time, and students may be more accustomed to being asked to turn them off during class. Reminding them of this, however, is probably still helpful. During exams you may want to ask students to leave cell phones and all hand-held wireless devices at home because they can provide temptations and opportunities for academic misconduct. Again, a straightforward statement of these ideas in your syllabus makes your expectations clear from the beginning and provides a written record for you to refer students to when issues arise.

\*Aguilar-Roca, N., Williams, A., Warrior, R., & O'Dowd, D. (2009). Two minute training in class significantly increases the use of professional formatting in student to faculty email correspondence. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 3 (1). <http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstol>