

# How to keep out of trouble in cyber-land

“I think I’ve killed them all. What should I do now?” This is a real text message someone we know recently received. The alarmed recipient had failed to remember a prior conversation with the sender on how to eliminate head lice. True story! It’s likely that we’ve all been on the sending or receiving end of communication that made no sense, or worse, served to offend.

Electronic communication systems, such as email, instant messaging, texting, and social networking, have both revolutionised and complicated the modern world. The ability to communicate briefly, immediately, and to a wide audience, certainly has its benefits, and its risks. Here are ten tips to keep you out of trouble in the world of cyber communication.

## 1. Count to 100

Maybe you received an email that made your blood boil. Or something just happened that you need to address immediately. Either way, responding by email, text or another written form, is forever. Toxic written communication will only serve to further inflame emotions. And it’s always there as evidence. If you’re moderately annoyed, count to 100 and re-read the message before sending. If you’re irate, wait 24 hours.

## 2. Ask why

It’s incredible how many heated discussions happen on social networking sites between people who have never even met! We see it on Facebook, Yammer, Twitter and even YouTube. The ability to offload immediate thoughts to the general public seems to be appealing. It’s also a permanent record in cyber-land. You never know where those comments will pop up in the future, or the impact they may have. So before you get all gung ho, forcing your opinion onto complete strangers, just ask yourself – why?

## 3. Don’t let your machine think for you

Pay attention to what you type and proof read before you send. Predictive text can completely change your message.

Think about what you’re trying to say, and choose each word. Don’t let your machine say it for you.

## 4. Concentrate

If you’re doing two things at once, and one of them is typing or texting, your communication is likely to miss the mark. For high thought activities like communication, multitasking has the same effect on your brain as missing an entire night’s sleep. So make sure you give your full attention to what you’re writing.

## 5. Respect the limitations

In written communication, tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and in some instances, context, are missing. You may unintentionally offend, or fail to get your point across, without carefully chosen words. Sometimes, face to face is best.

## 6. Watch your emphasis

Many believe that capital letters in written communication indicates that you’re yelling. Be careful how you accentuate your main points, particularly when the subject matter is serious or emotionally charged.

## 7. Spell check

In most circumstances, spell check is available for written communication. Make sure you use it whenever you can.

## 8. Beware of acronyms and initialisms

When someone ends with LOL, you need to know whether they’re laughing, or sending love to you. Don’t make the assumption that your recipient knows what you mean when you abbreviate!

## 9. ‘Reply All’ with caution

Some people just love cc-ing all and sundry. Seriously, the whole group

doesn’t need to know that your friend isn’t attending the function on the weekend. Particularly on email, keep it on a need to know basis. Choosing the recipients manually will also save you from sending a message to someone who really shouldn’t receive it.

## 10. Ask yourself what you hope to achieve

Before you hit ‘Send’, ask yourself if your message will have a positive impact? Will it resolve an issue or inflame it? Is it clear, constructive, relevant and timely for all recipients? Think about what you’re contributing to the communication.

A very wise person once said ‘Don’t communicate to be understood. Communicate to not be *misunderstood*’. Keep the message relevant, clear and simple, re-read before you send, and always consider the information the other person may not know or recall? And remember, there are some messages that should only be delivered in person. 💡

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