# **Communication, teamwork, and presentation skills**

## A guide to communicating with your peers (fellow students) through social media

Social media and instant messaging platforms like Messenger or WhatsApp offer a handy 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 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, lecturers, or 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 you have deleted posts 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, transphobic, threatening, or otherwise offensive or hurtful comments. The University’s [Student Code of Conduct](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/registrationoffice/files/Student-Code-of-Conduct-2019.pdf) 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 are observing the rules on [academic integrity](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/academicintegrity/). If you and your classmates submit identical or similar work, that work will likely be assessed for academic misconduct.

**Availability:** It’s OK to turn off the phone sometimes! You don’t have to be in constant contact with everyone at all times. Give yourself a break and switch off or silence notifications, 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.

**Stress can be 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:** If in doubt, check in with a trusted source, such as your programme director, academic advisor, class rep, mentor, lecturer, tutor, or course administrator.

**Bullying and harassment:** Sadly, bullying and harassment (including sexual harassment) can be a feature of online life. If you feel you are being bullied or harassed online, take action. If the platform 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](https://su.universityofgalway.ie/your-su/executive-committee/), the [Office of the Dean of Students](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/officeofthedeanofstudents/), the [Office of the Vice-President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/equalityanddiversity/), and/or the [Gardaí](https://www.garda.ie/en/) (the Irish police force). See also our Student [Anti-Bullying](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/studentservices/files/QA600-Student-Anti-Bullying-Policy.pdf) and [Harassment and Sexual Harassment](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/studentservices/files/QA606-Student-Harassment-and-Sexual-Harassment-Policy.22.pdf) policies.

Finally, we recommend reading the University’s [Social Media Policy](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/studentservices/files/Social-Media-Policy-v4.0-Staff-and-Students-2020.pdf) to make sure you are not breaching its provisions in your use of social media.

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