

REAL SIMPLE

| life made easier |



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10 proven ideas

Etiquette in the
age of technology

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1. You're walking down the street and listening to your iPod when you run into someone you know. Do you need to remove both earbuds to talk to her?

JODI R. R. SMITH: If you're having more than a two-minute conversation, then, yes, both buds need to come out—whether you turn off the device or not. And that goes for your Bluetooth earpiece, too.

JONI BLECHER: Yes. People want to know that the person they're talking to is really paying attention to them.

SUE FOX: Remember—etiquette is all about making the other person more comfortable. How comfortable could your friend be trying to talk to you when you've got something in your ears?

2. Is it rude to check your PDA at a friend's house?

BLECHER: A little bit. But if you arrive at a friend's home and explain that you need to check a few e-mails before you visit so you can give her your full attention, she will probably understand.

SMITH: It depends on how you're using it. If you're checking on something relevant to your visit, then no. If you find yourself perusing other e-mails, you will send the message that you're bored.

WILL SCHWALBE: Think of your PDA as a crossword puzzle. Anywhere it's acceptable to work on a crossword puzzle, it's OK to check your PDA.

3. How quickly must I respond to an e-mail? Are the standards different for work e-mails versus personal e-mails?

SCHWALBE: It's all about consistency. If you're going to deviate from what you usually do, use your out-of-office assistant or automatic-response setting to let people know why they might not be hearing from you as quickly as they're used to. You don't want them to think they've insulted you somehow or that you are ignoring them.

JUDITH KALLOS: Not responding quickly—within hours and certainly by the end of the day—to any e-mail might make the other side feel as though she's being overlooked. It's particularly important to respond promptly to business e-mails because that is professional and courteous.

ANNA POST: The sooner you can reply properly, the better. Never leave someone hanging.

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"Sorry, I didn't catch that. Your words are drowning out my lyrics."



4. If someone calls you, can you e-mail the person back or send a text message if you're not in the mood to talk? What if you text or e-mail someone and the person calls you back?

PIER M. FORNI: Unless the person has requested something specific or you sense a tinge of urgency, there's nothing uncivil about replying with a "Can we talk later?" text message.

SCHWALBE: Think about what is the best way to respond. If someone called you to get directions somewhere, for instance, reply via e-mail so you can send along a map.

BLECHER: If you text someone because you don't want to talk and the person calls back, don't answer. If you do answer, the other person will sense your foul mood immediately and might get offended. Just text back that you can't talk now but will call later. Your friend will thank you.

5. Is using BCC (blind carbon copy) on an e-mail considered sneaky?

SCHWALBE: Yes, and it's dangerous too, because your BCC can be exposed if the blind recipient hits Reply All or forwards the e-mail to someone else.

THE EXPERTS

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Judith Kallos oversees NetManners.com, a website dedicated to the topics of e-mail and Internet etiquette.

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