The Art of Digital Messaging
A Guide to Communication in the Digital Age

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The way we communicate has evolved, and so has the etiquette associated with it. Digital messaging allows us to transcend borders, languages and cultures, and with this global dialogue comes an increased need for courtesy and understanding.

Do the classic conventions of etiquette apply to digital messaging? To help set new norms of appropriate communication in the era of digital messaging, Messenger has partnered with Debrett’s, the renowned authority on modern etiquette, to develop the first formal guide of its kind on the etiquette of messaging.

This guide was informed by consumer research to gauge what is – and is not – acceptable to most when messaging. It is intended to help navigate the etiquette of messaging with the timeless values of courtesy and consideration, whether chatting with friends, family, co-workers or love interests.

3 in 4 global respondents said that *messaging etiquette* should be used when communicating through messaging apps

*For the purposes of this research study, Etiquette was defined as “a customary code of polite behaviour”*
1. Hone your tone

Keep the tone of your messages upbeat and neutral – avoid using sarcasm or irony unless you are confident the other person will get the joke. If you’re unsure how a message will be interpreted, include a positive symbol or affectionate emoji to make it clear it is well intended. And don’t forget to check for any accidental typos or auto-corrects that might distort your meaning.

When it comes to sarcasm via messaging, Americans are twice as likely to tackle it head on and ask for clarification while 31% of Brits just keep a stiff upper lip and ignore it.

2. Keep it concise … but not too concise

Stick to a few sentences, especially when you are messaging someone you don’t know well. Long paragraphs of text are overwhelming, and put the burden on the other person to respond in kind. If you have a lot to say, suggest a video chat instead.

On the other hand, consistently sending one-word messages or a single emoji looks curt and implies that you’re too busy or uninterested. Unless you are simply signing off or sending an acknowledgement, soften your message by stretching to at least a short sentence.

The average length of a message sent in Messenger is 5 words.
3. Don’t multi-message

Don’t send four or five messages if one will suffice. Multiple notifications are distracting and annoying, and make it difficult for the recipient to ignore their phone.

On a group chat, sending several messages at a time looks domineering, and can be confusing for other members playing catch-up on the conversation. And if someone leaves their phone unattended for a few minutes only to return to 27 new messages, it’s hard to resist checking what all the excitement is about.

Almost half of all global respondents consider forwarding friends’ texts to other people bad etiquette.

4. Share with care

Don’t forward a message to a third party unless the original sender has given permission or asked you to do so. They might consider that awkward family photo to be confidential, even if you don’t. If in doubt, ask first.

Equally, refrain from broadcasting other people’s private information on a group chat. Asking publicly about a friend’s recent dating exploits could leave them feeling exposed and embarrassed.
5. Know your audience

Invited to a group chat? Be sure to check who else is involved before sending a message. Failing to familiarise yourself with your audience leaves you vulnerable to indiscretion – like asking about a friend’s ‘pushy sister-in-law’ only to discover she’s party to the conversation.

Avoid sharing in-jokes or references that exclude others, and keep the conversation relevant to the majority. Start a separate message exchange if you need to make individual arrangements – spare the group a lengthy one-on-one about which café makes the best chai latte for your catch-up.

42% of global respondents prefer a group chat of under six people

6. Don’t leave them hanging

If a member of your group chat has sent a message without receiving a reply, alleviate their awkwardness with a response – even if only to ‘like’ their message or say that you don’t know the answer. This will prompt others to reply too.

If you’re the one left hanging, don’t take it personally. Follow up after 24 hours with a light-hearted ‘just checking in…’

Global respondents found it most frustrating when no one responds to a question or comment they shared, followed by when someone reveals private information to the whole group
Abide by the quick reply

It’s polite to reply promptly to messages, but if you’re busy and know that a message isn’t urgent, leave it unread until you have time to respond. Alternatively, turn on push notifications so that you can preview it on your screen without letting the other person know it has been seen. This gives you leeway to respond at your leisure, while the unread notification acts as a reminder to do so.

And unless a message is urgent, wait at least a day before chasing someone for a reply – even if you have seen it has been read. Bugging someone for a response after only a few hours is inconsiderate and puts the other person on the defensive.

Give up the ghosting

Losing interest in a conversation? Don’t just cut off all contact without warning. However tempting it is to avoid confrontation, ignoring someone’s messages constitutes ghosting and leads to anxiety and uncertainty.

If you want to end an interaction, do so openly but gently, with a brief, polite explanation. If you have been dating or have known someone a while, give them a call or let them know in person.

47% of global respondents have been ghosted and 39% of respondents admitted to ghosting someone else
9. **Practice good Exit-quette**

Fed up with the endless food photos sent in the family chat? Wanting out of the daily wedding prep updates on 'Kate's bridesmaids'? Before you make a run for it, formulate your exit plan.

Offer a brief explanation, keeping as close to the truth as possible: ‘Hi guys, I’m on deadline and need a break from my phone to get some work done!’ Then leave – there’s no need to wait around for replies. Just be prepared to find yourself reinstated if you imply your absence is only temporary.

Consider simply “muting” the conversation if you think exiting the chat is too extreme.

10. **Sign off in style**

Don’t over-estimate the value of saying bye. We might tease baby boomers for ending every message with “Love, Dad” but leaving your message hanging could cause confusion. If you’re switching gears to another activity, it’s best to let the other person know, even if it’s a simple, “be right back.”

Almost half of global 45-64 year olds surveyed always sign off every messaging conversation whereas only a third of 18-24 year olds feel a need to sign off.
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