

By KELVIN CHAN

Manners still matter

The unspoken group chat rules you're probably ignoring, but shouldn't.

COMMUNICATING on group chats has quickly become a way of life, but what are the rules?

We used to use email, the phone or talk in person. Now we use platforms like iMessage, WhatsApp or Slack to coordinate a night out with friends, a kid's birthday party, a work project or even to discuss sensitive military information – as US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth did by sharing details of airstrikes in a Signal chat.

But while group chats have exploded in popularity because of their informality, that also creates its own challenges: Discussions can veer off topic, repetitive or basic questions can irritate group members, and that viral meme you think is funny could also offend.

The principles of digital etiquette remain the same as other kinds of etiquette, but they are also “context specific and many of the rules are implicit rather than explicit,” said Rupert Wesson, a director at DebreTT's, the British etiquette guide, who outlined some key tips.

Think before messaging

Etiquette is always based on the idea of care and consideration for others, Wesson said. So it helps to think about how the recipients might be affected by your message.

That means, for example, not wasting other members' time by asking questions that could be easily answered by doing a Google search, or scrolling up or searching through the previous posts.

The Trent Windsurfing Club near Nottingham, England, which communicates with members using both WhatsApp and email, spells out other considerations in a 15-point list on its website.

“Don't get angry if someone doesn't respond to your message in a group. No one is obliged to do so. Better send him/her a direct message,” the club says.

Also, “Before sending a video, picture, meme or any content, analyse if such material will be in the interest of the majority of the members of the group.”

And avoid sending videos or files that are very large, because “nobody likes to saturate the memory of their smartphone or waste their data/Internet plan on nonsense,” its guidance says. The club did not respond to a request for comment.

Remember the aim of the chat

Always consider the chat group's purpose. For those created with a specific and practical function in mind, just stick to the task and don't post any more than you need to, Wesson said.

On the other hand, “some groups are there for frivolity and here, more is more,” he added.

It should be obvious, but don't post personal stuff in a company or business-related chat, and refrain from posting work-related material in a group with friends or family.

It doesn't hurt to lurk first before weighing in, partly because on some chat platforms new members can't see what

was posted before they joined.

“It is always best to err on the side of caution until you are very clear on the purpose and culture of the group,” Wesson said.

Consider the group's size

Do you need to respond to

every message? There's often someone who feels the need to type out a reply to every post, even if it's just to say “thanks”. But doing so in a big group might be somewhat akin to an email reply-all storm.

Wesson advises considering how many people are in the chat.

“If there are three of you in the group, a response, if only an

many white collar workers now using chat platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams rather than email to communicate.

These platforms feel less formal than email but don't forget to follow the same guidelines as you do with other company-

This visual is human-created, AI-aided

emoji, is almost expected,” Wesson said. “In group of 50 or more it is practically a criminal offence.”

Keep it clean and decent, especially at work

This is an especially important point when it comes to work communications, with

related communications. “Assume anything messaged can be forwarded and be especially cautious of work chats (however informal they appear),” Wesson said.

“As countless people have discovered at employment tribunals, any diversion into anything indecorous can be career limiting.”

Less can be more in chats

Chat messages should be short and sweet.

One reason is that your words could come across differently depending on the person reading the message, so stick to using short sentences to avoid being misinterpreted.

If it's about work, and you want to discuss something in more length and detail, consider an in-person meeting, a phone call, or email instead.

“No one wants to read a seven-inch-long unformatted message when an organised attachment would have worked better,” the American etiquette experts at The Emily Post Institute, advised in a blog post on business communications.

Message clarity and style matter

It's not a college essay, so the rules around grammar, punctuation or even emoji don't need to be too strict.

“You should not feel too constricted and nor should you judge others for playing fast and loose with the King's English,” Wesson said. “Just let brevity and clarity be your guide.”

Speaking of emoji, they're fun and can convey your meaning as well as the most thoughtful turn of phrase, Wesson said. But don't abuse them because they can be a “minefield”.

There's a world of difference between, for example, the crying emoji and the crying with laughter emoji, he said. It's best to play it safe and avoid emoji when, for example, sending condolences, Wesson said.

How to properly leave a chat group

If you're getting annoyed by the number of message notifications from a big chat group, or you feel uncomfortable because of some of the comments, just put it on mute. And don't be afraid to leave the group if you don't need to be in it.

Before leaving, consider letting the chat administrator know.

“The group administrator has a responsibility to ensure the chat serves its purpose and that things don't get too out of hand,” Wesson says.

What should admins do if certain people are causing problems?

“If things are going awry, deleting a member is an option but perhaps a little drastic. A quiet DM or a brief muting should always be considered first,” Wesson says.

If you do leave the chat, should you say farewell?

Again, it depends on the context. If it's for a one-off event with a lot of people you don't know, there's probably no need.

But if, say, you're part of a remote work project, it would be a good idea to notify everyone.

“When leaving make it clear that you are removing yourself immediately so the chat does not fill up with people wishing you farewell,” Wesson said. – AP