



Etiquette guide and chat rules when using MS Teams at Saarland University

The Digital Learning Project

Digitalization and Sustainability Unit | Version 1.0 | 26 May 2020

Please note: This translation is provided for information purposes only. In the event of any discrepancies between the translation and the original German version, the latter shall take precedence.

1 The challenge

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Saarland University faces the very significant challenge of continuing to deliver high-quality education without students or staff being physically present on campus.

Microsoft Teams provides a workspace that enables members of the university's teaching staff to communicate directly with groups of students via its chat feature.

New forms of communication, especially internet-based services, offer scope for users to interpret how they choose to interact with one another. For many years online communities have been using netiquette ('network etiquette'), which is essentially a body of rules stating how people should conduct themselves when communicating over networks.

Saarland University is now introducing a similar set of communication rules for how chats are to be conducted on Microsoft (MS) Teams, which is the standard tool available to all members of the university. Compliance with these rules is mandatory. The rules ensure that virtual communication between people who typically do not know each other personally remains respectful and encourages participants to be appreciative of others.

2 General chat rules and group etiquette

Please show respect towards the other participants in a web meeting and act responsibly at all times, irrespective of whether you are communicating via MS Teams or another platform. Your conduct should comply with the basic principles of social etiquette and you should observe the following rules:

- Be polite. Show respect and be friendly when you communicate. Share your thoughts and ideas in a constructive and positive manner, even if your views differ from those of others.
- Please be sensitive to intercultural aspects in your communications. Different cultures have different notions of what is regarded as polite. Saarland University is one of the universities in Germany with a very large proportion of international students. Avoid the use of slang, abbreviations, jokes or comments, as other students may not be native speakers of the language being used for communication and might misunderstand what has been said or even find the remarks offensive.
- Do not harass or annoy those you are interacting with. Do not be intrusive by overstepping boundaries or ignoring limits. Depending on its content, a chat message may be regarded by

the recipient as having crossed a line or may even be perceived as sexual harassment. Do not send messages with personal content to others without being asked. Communications with persons you are not well acquainted with should be concise and limited to professional matters.

- Do not use inappropriate language. This can include coded language, particularly abbreviations, that might look or sound offensive and that might cause others to feel pressured, threatened or insulted. Remarks of a racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual nature are completely inappropriate and are prohibited. Activities such as stalking, bullying, cyberharassment, online grooming and sexualized discrimination and violence are taken very seriously and will be punished by the university as breaches of these guidelines. Such activity may also constitute a criminal offence.
- Do not post spam. The chat feature should be used solely to facilitate relevant and constructive communication. Do not post private content in a public chat.
- Do not post any illegal content. Sharing illegal material is strictly prohibited. Illegal content covers text, hyperlinks, audio and video files, software and other content that is illegal in Germany. Do not mention or share links to illegal download sites.
- Protect your personal data. Be extremely careful when transmitting personal information such as your phone number, private address, passwords, credit card information, etc.
- Ensure that you have an appropriate choice of background when taking part in video group meetings. Complying with netiquette rules also applies to visual communication. Your actions and appearance should be both professional and appropriate.
- Please note the important difference between emails and chats. A chat is a fast and responsive medium with numerous benefits. It enables you to rapidly share information and ideas, which can be particularly valuable when working with others on a common project. Any requests for information concerning employment contracts, organizational and scheduling issues or business and financial matters (e.g. applications for annual leave or student-related administrative questions) should be sent by email to the relevant contact. In view of the large number of requests that Saarland University is currently processing, you should assume that, until further notice, answers can only be guaranteed when requests are submitted by email.
- Set your availability status in MS Teams. Please consider the value to others of explicitly setting your availability status in MS Teams. However, please also remember that if someone's status is set to 'Available' (green dot), this does not automatically mean that the team member can answer your enquiry immediately or that they are actually directly available at that precise moment.
- Links to team meetings: Links to team meetings may not be forwarded to others without first consulting the meeting organizer. This also applies to explicit rules on people deputizing on

your behalf. If you are unable to take part in a meeting, please notify the organizer and, if appropriate, specify who will be participating in your place. Do not simply forward the link to the meeting to another person.

Saarland University reserves the right to take appropriate action in the event of breaches of these netiquette rules.

Incidences of inappropriate content or inappropriate posts/messages can be reported to the following units:

- Equal Opportunity Office, Tel. 0681 302-4795, email: gleichstellung@uni-saarland.de
- Legal Department, email: justiziariat@uni-saarland.de
- Personnel Department, email: personal@uni-saarland.de

3 General information

In addition to the etiquette and chat rules above, please also observe the following:

- If you become aware that you have been accidentally granted access to areas, data, conversations or conferences that you should not have access to, please notify [the staff at the University IT Centre \(HIZ\)](#). Do not take advantage of these errors.
- If your availability status or your presence status in chat rooms is not being displayed correctly, please report the problem to the HIZ staff using the [ticketing system](#).
- Whenever you enter a chat room or join a meeting, please make your presence known to the other chat room members or participants.
- If you need to transmit confidential information, use confidential, closed and secure communication channels. If you are not sure whether a communication channel is secure, ask the HIZ staff using the [ticketing system](#).
- If you notice that an app is not working properly or you have problems using MS Teams, please open a support ticket in the [HIZ ticketing system](#).