Your college writing experience does not start and end with your composition courses. In fact, writing is part of every aspect of your college education, including what it takes to be admitted and enrolled, maintain your financial aid, receive advising, and progress through your degree program. The first section of this Guide is designed to help you understand what it means to write at the college level (Chapter 1, *College-Level Writing*), see how writing impacts your education at Kaplan University (Chapter 2, *Writing Across the Curriculum*), as well as learn about the intricacies and importance of writing in your classes (Chapter 3, *Discussion Boards*) and communicating with instructors and students (Chapter 4, *E-mail Etiquette* and Chapter 5, *Using AOL Instant Messenger [AIM]*). Although you might already engage in e-mail and chat with friends and family on AIM, you are now working with these tools in a professional setting, which carries with it different expectations from what you have in a more casual environment.

Learning to communicate effectively in these main areas will help you become a stronger writer, and using clear communication will help you to have a better college experience as well.
We all write every day. We write lists, letters, e-mails, and text messages. We post updates on sites like Twitter and Facebook. We leave notes for friends, colleagues, parents, or children. We put pen to paper or fingers to keyboards many times over the course of a day. This writing shares some basic characteristics. Whether you are writing a grocery list or penning a thank you to a friend, all writing has a message, an intended audience, and some sort of order and format.

So what distinguishes all of this writing from the writing you are being asked to do in your college courses and in the workplace?

College-level writing, also referred to as academic writing, sets itself apart by requiring the writer to integrate research, reading, and critical analysis into the writing process. College-level writing requires both critical thinking and reading skills. The three (critical thinking, reading, and writing) are unquestionably bound together. Consider this scenario: Your instructor assigns you a persuasive essay on the topic of your choice. You review the project guidelines and then brainstorm for possible topics. Once you decide on your subject, you head to the library to gather some research so you can expand your knowledge and gather some evidence to help prove your point. You read several articles on the subject, sifting through them to identify those that are useful and pertain to your topic and discarding others that are not. You highlight passages or sentences you find compelling. You then set about writing your paper, synthesizing what you have read with your own ideas, and inserting supporting documentation as
needed. You then review what you have written, reconsider your argument, and ensure that you have proven your point, potentially revising as a result. What was involved in that process? You started by thinking critically about the assignment and then the subject you decided to investigate. You then engaged in research and critical reading. You wrote, and you again stopped to think critically about what you had written. If you take one of these away—thinking, reading, or writing—the entire process derails.

The process just described might be slightly different from the one you were taught to use during your precollege writing training. Previously, you might have been discouraged from including original ideas or personal insight in your writing. However, college-level writing requires that you learn to skillfully integrate those, along with reliable research, into your writing. This kind of writing is how you, as an educated individual, contribute to the overall conversation and body of knowledge within your chosen field. It is the type of writing and level of critical thought that employers are seeking in college graduates.

**THINKING CRITICALLY**

Simply put, critical thinking is the ability to look below the surface and evaluate arguments. Critical thinkers do not automatically accept things as presented. They ask questions and consider all of the evidence, challenging others and themselves in the process. They apply these tactics both in their reading and in their own writing.

Though you might not have considered it before, you engage in critical thinking on a regular basis. Critical thinking allows you to make decisions. When you chose where to attend college, you most likely researched several possibilities, compared the offerings with the criteria that were most important to you, asked questions or requested additional information, and, ultimately, made a choice based on what you reviewed. You thought critically about what you wanted and what the various schools offered to make your decision.
Avoiding Faulty Logic
One barrier to critical thinking that we must always be on guard against is faulty logic. Flawed reasoning, also known as a logical fallacy, comes in a variety of forms. Some faulty arguments are easy to spot, but others can be quite tricky, disguising themselves with partial truth or evidence taken out of context. Table 1.1 discusses the most common types. Critical thinkers must always be mindful to avoid these fallacies in their own writing and to spot them in the arguments of others.

Table 1.1 LOGICAL FALLACIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALLACY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ad hominem</td>
<td>Attacks an individual rather than the argument; often comes in the form of character assault</td>
<td>Those who argue against abortion might cite religious convictions as their reason, but they are clearly antifeminists bent on punishing women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandwagon</td>
<td>Insinuates that because something is popular it is true and that the reader is somehow abnormal or missing out by not joining in or subscribing to the idea</td>
<td>Everyone agrees that communism cannot work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular reasoning</td>
<td>Uses the argument to prove the argument</td>
<td>All prescription drugs are safe because they are legal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either/or reasoning</td>
<td>Falsely asserts that there are only two sides to the issue or two solutions to a problem—the right one and the wrong one</td>
<td>You either believe in absolute freedom, or you favor tyranny.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1.1 LOGICAL FALLACIES [continued]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALLACY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Makes a broad statement with little to no supporting evidence; usually includes words like all, never, and every</td>
<td>Everyone agrees that animal rights are the top concern for the 2012 election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non sequitur</td>
<td>Asserts a claim that does not logically emerge from the initial statement</td>
<td>You should drive a hybrid vehicle. They are expensive cars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post hoc</td>
<td>Assumes events are connected simply because one preceded the other; faulty cause-and-effect reasoning</td>
<td>I went to the store and now I have a flat tire. I should have stayed home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red herring</td>
<td>Attempts to draw attention away from the argument by introducing a new subject</td>
<td>Yes, there are some concerns regarding the safety of the vehicle, but what is important to note is how many jobs have been saved by expanding the product line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slippery slope</td>
<td>Claims that one action or idea will absolutely lead to another, eventually resulting in a negative outcome</td>
<td>We must allow prayer in schools. If we take that away, we are going to become a nation of godless criminals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straw man</td>
<td>Incorrectly presents opposing viewpoints and then refutes those incorrect points to make the argument appear stronger</td>
<td>My opponent says that we must cut school funding. I am morally opposed to taking education away from our children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### READING CRITICALLY

Research and reading are among the key factors that distinguish college-level writing from that of precollege writing. As has been
discussed, a college-level writer must employ critical-thinking skills throughout the writing process. This concept of digging below the surface extends to reading as well. A critical reader does not just read words on a page and accept them at face value. Instead, the critical reader pushes deeper to analyze the text. Here are some questions to consider when reading critically:

- What are the author’s biases?
- Is the argument presented valid?
- Is the argument adequately supported?
- Are supporting sources reliable?
- Does the author use faulty reasoning?
- Does the author consider and/or refute alternative perspectives?

Critical readers are active readers, and active readers engage with the text. Like critical thinking, critical-reading skills can be honed. You can employ a number of strategies to improve your critical-reading skills and become a more active reader.

**Previewing**

Previewing is a quick review of an article with the intent of identifying the general purpose and main points of the piece. Previewing an article allows the reader to complete additional, deeper readings with purpose. A preview often generates questions that you can then use to guide your second reading.

When previewing an article, you should start by skimming the article, noting the title and subheadings to get an idea of the organization of the work. You should also review any tables, graphs, or other visual aids if present. Finally, read the abstract or introductory paragraph as well as the concluding paragraph. If the article includes an author biography, review that as well. Information about the author can clue you in to potential biases and should not be overlooked.
Annotated Reading
Annotated reading should be done once a preview or surface-level reading has been completed. During an annotated reading, you should highlight or underline main points and key words or passages. Making notes about your impressions and ideas in the margins or jotting down questions makes reading an active process and takes you deeper into the material. It makes the reading more of a conversation between the reader and writer, even if it is an asynchronous one. You can also annotate electronic pieces, by using the highlighting and commenting features in Microsoft® Word and Adobe® Acrobat® 9 or by using social bookmarking sites, such as Digg, Reddit, Stumbleupon, or del.icio.us.

Reviewing
A review is similar to a preview; it should focus on the same areas you focused on during that exercise. Take a second look at the passages you highlighted during your annotated reading and review any notes or questions you included in the margins. If your preview generated questions, check to see if they were answered during your annotated reading.
Outlining
You might have learned to outline as a prewriting technique (see Chapter 13, *Outlining*, pp. 143–158), but it also can assist you as a critical reader. Instead of building an outline to guide your writing, you are deconstructing the article and putting it into a simplified visual format. This technique offers a few advantages. First, it tests your comprehension of the article’s thesis and main points by challenging you to restate them in your own words. It also allows you to clearly see the structure of the article. Finally, it can alert you to missing information or poorly supported points.

Summarizing
Writing a summary of what you have read is a good way to test your comprehension of the material. However, like outlining, it can also assist you in spotting holes in an argument or gaps in presented research. A summary should include the central idea and supporting points of the article or reading. Take the time to put your summary down on paper so you can carefully review it, but do not worry about formatting or editing. This is a tool for you. Remember, a summary should be in your own words, just like the outline.

Writing allows us to communicate with the world around us. It is a mode of expression, a vehicle for information, and a means of persuasion. You probably produce at least one piece of writing every day, but in your college courses, you will practice different modes of writing to strengthen your skills and fine-tune your writing process. As you progress through your program of study, this practice will help you grow not only as a writer, but also as a reader and critical thinker.
It would be impossible to overemphasize the importance of writing. Traditionally, colleges saw writing classes as something to get past—particularly for those majoring in subjects outside the liberal arts. In the 1980s, colleges began to shift their attitudes toward writing and their obligation to provide rigorous writing training for their students. Instead of seeing writing as an isolated subject, the advantages of emphasizing writing in other classes came to be seen as a benefit. Janet Emig, a teacher and theorist, posited that writing itself is a mode of learning. It can seem that writing is just a task, but think of all the learning created by the writing process. It becomes a meaningful way to engage in critical thinking, which leads us not just to repeat facts, but also to analyze and synthesize ideas. This initiative has adopted the name Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC).

Kaplan University (KU) has adopted WAC as part of its mission to afford students a robust education, preparing them to succeed academically and professionally. No matter what major you choose or career you pursue, writing is an integral requirement. A good example of this is Albert Einstein, arguably the greatest thinker of the twentieth century. Although a man of science, Einstein also had to be a man of words. When he first conceived the theory of relativity, Einstein was at a loss to explain it to anyone else. In his own mind, it made perfect sense; when he first tried to communicate it, he had difficulty.
So, even Einstein had to brainstorm, draft, and revise! The bottom line is that unshared knowledge is good to no one. It is only our ability to effectively express ideas that has impact.

**WORDS FROM WRITERS**
**Writing Flexibly**
“We often think of writing as straightforward but that sometimes can make things too rigid. Writing hardly ever happens by writing from the beginning to the end in a straight line.”
—Beth Duckles, Assistant Professor of Sociology

The ability to measure how academically literate students are is an opportunity for the learner and the college. Alongside curriculum development, KU has adopted General Education Literacies (GELs). These literacies allow faculty and administrators to track students’ progress as they move through KU courses. In fact, a WAC GEL is present in each course and evaluates the student’s ability to communicate effectively within a discipline. So, not only will you have your performance evaluated by a professional, but you also have the opportunity to track your own progress. Consistent assessment allows students to follow their skill growth throughout their program of study. By the time students graduate, they have an accurate picture of their writing abilities. After all, this is the mission driving WAC—to empower students to improve and grow. Like the Einstein example indicates, we will be most successful when we join our writing skills with our expertise. In our communication, we want to emphasize accessibility. We must always manage the needs of our audience and do so without sacrificing content. WAC is designed to make you such a writer—one who takes care of his or her reader.
The Discussion Board constitutes the asynchronous component of a course. Asynchronous means that you do not have to respond right away; instead, you can take your time throughout the week to think through the reading and other course material. You can then form a response and review it carefully before posting it. The Discussion Board provides a forum for students to ask and answer important questions about the course material. Discussion is formal, and your responses, in both content and writing style, should demonstrate thoughtful reflection and review.

On the Discussion Board, you may respond to Internet “field trips” and discussion questions centered on the unit’s topic and/or reading. You also will receive constructive feedback from the instructor and other students in the class on your understanding of the unit’s topic. Your participation in this arena is critical to getting the most out of an online course. Immerse yourself in this environment: Craft thoughtful, substantive responses to the discussion questions and to your classmates and the instructor, too. Substantive responses are thoughtful and original considerations of the discussion topic. In short, they have substance! Nonsubstantive responses such as “I agree” or “yes/no” responses do not meet the criteria for Discussion Board participation. In fact, they do nothing to contribute to the conversation or move it forward. This chapter helps you construct effective and appropriate responses on the Discussion Board.
HOW TO COMPOSE AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE ON THE DISCUSSION BOARD

Before heading into the Discussion Board responses for the first time, be sure to review the requirements for the Discussion Board from your course syllabus. Each course and/or instructor may have slightly different requirements. Typically, though, instructors expect to see at least 100 words in a substantive response with no grammatical or spelling errors.

Discussion Board responses should be on topic, original in thought, and contribute to the discussion. To help advance the discussion and your understanding of the course material, you should post responses on the Discussion Board frequently throughout the week. When you wait to respond until the last day of the unit or in the last few hours of the unit, or even worse, after the unit has passed, it is nearly impossible to help advance the discussion and/or gain substantial feedback from your classmates or instructor.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS
Managing Time
You want the most out of your college education, so it is important that you give yourself the time you need to make the most of this time in your life. When you enroll for a class, you might have a one-hour seminar each week, along with other assignments, such as reading, discussion, and a project. It is a good rule of thumb to schedule 3–5 hours per week just for reading, developing a thoughtful discussion response, and then engaging with other students and your instructor on the Discussion Board. When you have a project due in a unit, schedule an additional 3–5 hours that week to give yourself plenty of time to conduct research and use the writing process.

Writing Discussion Board responses clearly means staying on topic; don’t jump from topic to topic as it will confuse your reader. If you intend to write about multiple topics, use paragraph breaks and headings to help clearly transition your response.
To demonstrate your knowledge of the unit’s reading and intended objectives for the week, incorporate references to the reading material in your responses. This helps demonstrate to your instructor that you understand and can apply what you have read. Be sure to cite the source giving proper credit, but try to avoid using too many quotes. Students typically learn better when paraphrasing material and then illustrating unit or course concepts through personal examples, if applicable. Just keep in mind that even when paraphrasing, you still need to cite the sources.

Many times, a discussion question will contain multiple questions, so it is important to answer each question. It is usually appropriate to use paragraph breaks between the questions or paragraph headings to help clarify which questions you are responding to.

The following is an example of a Discussion Board question and a response that includes paragraph breaks and headings:

**Discussion Board Question Example**

**Part I: Identify a profession you are interested in. Do some research and find:**

- **Terminology that is commonly used in the profession.** Note: These terms do not have to be exclusive to one profession.
- **Acronyms used in the profession.** These can include laws, professional organizations, or buzzwords. Examples include FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act), TQM (Total Quality Management), or ASQ (American Society for Quality).
- **KSAOs (Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other Characteristics) that appear to be required in and/or for specific jobs within this profession.**

**Part II: Compose your response.**

Based on the ideas generated in Part I, compose a Discussion Board response that highlights at least five terms, acronyms, or KSAOs.
Briefly define or describe each one. (Paraphrase these in your own words and reference the source.) In addition, explain, in your opinion, how important it is to use appropriate career-based terminology in your professional communications.

**Discussion Board Response Example**

**Terminology/Acronyms**

*In my line of work as a technical writer, we use the following terminology and acronyms.*

1. **Technical Specifications**: Detailed terms or conditions under which something, such as a product or an electronic document like a Web page, is produced.

2. **Statement of Work (SOW)**: A document that specifies terms and conditions, as well as the exact tasks associated with a project. If a project calls for only the development of a prototype, then the team is not responsible for writing user documentation for the prototype unless it is part of the SOW.

3. **Document lifecycle**: The process associated with creating a document like an analysis report or software manual. The lifecycle begins with ideas for the document and ends when the document is delivered to the client.

4. **Technical Review**: A document review by experts in a particular field. A technical review is conducted to ensure the content is accurate from a scientific or technical point of view.

5. **Subject Matter Expert (SME)**: A person who is an expert in a particular field. In the review process, a SME may be called on to be a technical reviewer.

**Knowledge and Skills Required for a Technical Writer**

*In general, technical writers must have strong writing and speaking skills. This is because most technical writers are required to do more than just write, which is why they are also called technical communicators. Technical writers work in a variety of professions including information*
technology, engineering and other science-related fields, medicine, and business. Generally, technical writers create user manuals, instructions, online help guides, and other documents that help non-technical readers perform or understand more specialized or technical tasks or information (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). In some rare cases, a person without a college degree can work as a technical writer; however, as industries and businesses become more complex and specialized, more employers require technical writers to have at least a bachelor’s degree in English or a writing-related field. Other important skills a technical writer must possess are strong organizational skills and attention to detail, because they are often not only writers but editors too.

Reference

When responding on the Discussion Board, do not use abbreviations and/or acronyms that are not common; spell out and define acronyms and abbreviations on first use.

When responding to Discussion Board questions or to your classmates, ask these questions of yourself before submitting the post:

1. Would a reader understand what this message pertains to without reading any other messages?
2. Have I articulated why I have expressed this opinion? Have I supported my response with a well-developed argument or specific references to research (i.e., unit reading or self-directed research)? Is the post thoughtful, well-constructed, and relevant to the class?
3. Is my message or response clear? Have I fully explained my responses?
4. Have I quoted the particular elements of the message that I am responding to?
5. How have I used complete sentences, proper grammar, syntax, and citation (where necessary)?

HOW TO INCORPORATE READING INTO DISCUSSION RESPONSES

Although your Discussion Board postings should be original, it is important to back up your thoughts with experts from the field you are studying. This usually means referring back to the reading from the course material and especially to the active unit in which you are participating. It might also mean conducting some independent research and providing the references to supplemental materials or sources.

Be sure to cite your sources in the reading, using a proper citation style. Proper citation (as shown in the previous Discussion Board example) includes in-text citations for quotes and paraphrases, as well as a full citation at the end of your post.

HOW TO USE QUESTIONING ON THE DISCUSSION BOARD

Participating in Discussion Boards is important because you can demonstrate your knowledge of a topic as well as ask for clarifications and/or additional input. You can engage either your instructor and/or classmates on a topic in a number of ways:

1. Ask other students questions about their ideas/experiences.
2. Ask the group a question about the week’s reading if you would like more information.
3. Discuss a related work issue on which you would like some feedback.

When incorporating questions in your responses, try asking probing questions (i.e., Can you tell me more about _________? or Can you provide an example of a time when you used this methodology?) rather than simple yes/no types of questions. The goal is to spark a discussion and get others to provide you with some clarifications on
their experiences that illustrate the objective of the unit. When someone has responded to you, be sure to acknowledge the response and ask further questions. You can also summarize your peers’ responses to show you understand what they have said. Think of this type of response as a verbal dialogue; it is important to uphold your end of the conversation just as you would if you were in a conversation with someone in person.

HOW TO RESPOND TO PEERS ON THE DISCUSSION BOARD

As with the original response to the discussion thread, it is important to elaborate when responding to peers on the Discussion Board. In general, responses should be more substantive than “I agree” or “Great post.” Just as you are looking for feedback from your peers, they are looking for quality feedback from you. Again, refer to your course syllabus for exact posting requirements, but usually there is a two-post minimum per discussion thread. This is in addition to the response to the original discussion question.

Here are some tips for responding to your peers:

1. Does your response to another student advance the discussion? Does it contribute to the overall discussion being developed? A post can help the conversation move forward in several different ways:
   a. Add additional information. Research and share a fact related to class topics.
   b. Elaborate upon a point. For instance, if one of your classmates makes several points in summary fashion, take one or more of the points, elaborate, and expand on them.
   c. Ask thoughtful questions. If you see something in the post that you don’t understand, ask about it. Refer to the previous section, “How to Use Questioning on the Discussion Board,” p. 18.
   d. Disagree. Post a reasonable disagreement, but always remember to respect someone else’s viewpoint. Provide a reference to an expert who supports your alternative viewpoint.
2. Is the post appropriate? Posts that are inappropriate in either tone or content will not be counted for grading purposes (and may be removed at your instructor’s discretion). Always respect your instructor and peers. It is fine to disagree with a viewpoint, but be sure your responses fully and fairly discuss the viewpoint that you disagree with and do not attack the other student or instructor.

3. Does the post add value to the discussion, or is it simply a response to fill a square?

4. Does the post expand on the main theme (in the discussion question, assignment posting, or weekly summary)?

5. Here are some additional ways in which you can substantially contribute to the discussion and engage in dialogue with your peers:
   a. Share a related personal or professional experience. Comment on others’ experiences. Stay on topic, though.
   b. Offer a different perspective on the week’s topic (play devil’s advocate).
   c. Describe an interesting idea from the week’s reading, and explain what insights you gained from it or how you’re applying the information.
   d. Share another resource you have used as you explored the course topics (Web links, library articles, etc.).

Discussion responses are an important part of online learning. When you can discuss a topic in your own words and provide course reading or other research to support your ideas, you have truly learned the concepts or ideas in a course. It takes practice to do this well, so it is important to complete the unit reading first and then take the time to craft your discussion responses in a thoughtful fashion. In addition, be sure to review your responses before posting to the board. When you take the time to respectfully and fully converse on a subject, you and your classmates will see how far you can actually take a subject.
E-mail is one of the most typical forms of online communication. In a school setting, e-mail is used as a means for professors and students to communicate about academic matters outside of class; it is used to conduct business, such as solving issues related to registration or financial aid; and it is used for personal communication, such as chatting with fellow students. Although many people use e-mail regularly, it might be new for some. It is important to understand how to use e-mail professionally and courteously no matter to whom you are writing.

For academic purposes related to your schoolwork at Kaplan University, this chapter focuses on composing e-mails for these main audiences: instructors, advisors and other Kaplan University personnel, and fellow students.

**COMPOSING E-MAIL TO INSTRUCTORS**

Before writing an e-mail to an instructor, identify what you want to happen as a result of the e-mail. Do you want information about an assignment so you can begin work on it? Do you want a question answered? Do you want to set up a time to meet online or ask the instructor to call you? Ask yourself exactly what you want from the instructor so that you can compose your e-mail effectively.
Going to school online is certainly a convenient way for busy adults to pursue a college education. Although it is convenient to study and attend classes from home via computer, a college education is still something that requires a time commitment. Additionally, it is important that online learners communicate regularly with their instructors and advisors, and that they seek help when they need it. For instance, the Kaplan University Writing Center offers a variety of services and resources to help students with their writing. All it takes is a few clicks and you will find live tutors, a library of writing resources, a workshop calendar and links to current and pre-recorded sessions, and a host of additional helpful resources—all available to you for free—and many are accessible 24/7.

Instructors at Kaplan University usually teach more than one class, so the subject line of an e-mail is important. Identify your class and section number in the subject line followed by a short explanation for the e-mail, such as CM102-03: Question about Unit 2 Project.

The opening of your e-mail sets the tone for the whole communication. No matter to whom you are writing, start out by addressing them respectfully, such as Dear Laurie, or Dear Professor Novy, or Dear Ms. Smith (or however they asked you to address them). If you are unsure about how to address someone, always err on the side of the more formal, such as using Dr., Ms., or Mr. It is unprofessional (and sometimes even considered rude) to omit a salutation (the opening line of Dear...) in an e-mail.

As mentioned previously, instructors often teach more than one class, so if your name is not clearly denoted in your e-mail address (especially if you use an off-campus e-mail address), begin your e-mail by identifying yourself, such as My name is Sally Smith, and I am in your CM 102-03 course. After that, you can begin composing the main message of your e-mail. Before identifying the problem or reason for the e-mail, provide some background information necessary to understand the issue you are writing about. Providing proper context helps
your instructor understand your situation, and it will assist with identifying the best way to help. Next, identify the issue you are writing about and offer a statement regarding what action you would like as a result of this correspondence. It can be as simple as *I am working on the project in unit 2, and I do not understand part of the assignment. Can you please answer the following question for me?*

E-mail is also a good tool to communicate with instructors for more personal issues regarding your coursework, too. Some students use e-mail to discuss comments or an assignment grade. This is perfectly appropriate if you compose the e-mail in a professional manner and not as a means for “venting.” Sometimes emotions can affect communication, causing unclear or misguided communication. It might be difficult for you to define a specific problem if you are frustrated, and this can lead to “kitchen-sinking” (saying absolutely everything that is bothering you) or a flooded disclosure in the communication act, which also causes a breakdown in communication. If you are frustrated or upset, take some time to cool down before composing the e-mail. Remember, all communication at Kaplan University needs to be professional, no matter whom you are addressing.

Another aspect that can muddy the waters in an e-mail is diction or word choice. Once again, emotions can get in the way of choosing the right words, so take care not to let emotions guide your correspondence in any way. On the same note, you should follow proper *netiquette*. For instance, if you use all capital letters in an e-mail or end a sentence with exclamation points, it can connote emotion that perhaps you did not intend. Typing in all capital letters, for example, in the online world equates to shouting. Avoiding emotionally charged words can help lead to the success of the e-mail. Finally, it is polite to thank the instructor for his or her time and to add a closing.

Once you have finished writing the e-mail, the final step prior to sending it is to proofread to check for mechanical or grammatical errors. Conducting a spell check is a good habit to develop. The spell check feature in your word-processing program usually catches unin-
tentional misspellings that could convey carelessness or might result in a misunderstanding, but spell check doesn’t catch all errors. Be sure to carefully proofread. Avoiding online jargon (such as FYI, LOL, BRB, IMHO, etc.) is a consideration as well. E-mail that is heavily convoluted with texting jargon is inappropriate when addressed to an instructor and should be avoided.

The following list summarizes the previous points:

- Identify the action item you want to occur as a result of your e-mail prior to writing it.
- Realize that instructors have many courses and students, so properly identify yourself by full name and course affiliation in the subject line or the opening line of the e-mail.
- Address your professor with the proper title to convey respect.
- Provide background information and establish the context necessary to understand the message.
- Avoid kitchen-sinking and focus on the issue and action item (make the correspondence clear and concise).
- Avoid emotionally-charged wording.
- Thank the instructor and close appropriately.
- Use proper grammar and punctuation and conduct a spell check.

Overall, consider your audience when composing an e-mail to an instructor. This can help a great deal with tone and effectiveness. Always keep in mind that there is a real person who will open and read your e-mail; therefore, treating instructors as you would want to be treated is a good way to approach the process.

**COMPOSING E-MAIL TO ADVISORS AND OTHER KU PERSONNEL**

Prior to preparing an e-mail to an advisor or other Kaplan University personnel, use the same thinking and process mentioned in the pre-
ceeding section, “Composing E-mail to Instructors.” In other words, consider what you want to happen as a result of the e-mail and consider whether e-mail is the best way to communicate that need (sometimes a phone call might be best). This determination should help you keep the e-mail correspondence clear and concise and ensure successful communication.

In e-mails to advisors or other Kaplan University personnel, begin with a proper salutation, such as Dear Angela or Ms. Sanchez or Mr. Reed. As with any other e-mail, if you are unsure how to address the person, go with the more formal approach. Advisors and other university personnel work with thousands of students at any given time, so always identify yourself in the subject and opening lines of your e-mail, as well as give them a brief explanation of what you are inquiring about, such as “I have a question about my registration for next term.”

The body of the message should include context or background information that might help the person understand the subsequent message. For instance, if you need assistance and you have contacted other personnel but without success, indicate that in your message. Then tell the person what you would like as a result of the e-mail. This step helps greatly in e-mail correspondence because it takes away the assumptions that a specific action will occur as a result of the e-mail. Once you indicate what you want, provide details that would help bring about this action. For instance, if you want an advisor to contact you, provide your phone number and times when you are available (and include your time zone).

After composing your message, proofread the e-mail to ensure proper tone, grammar, and mechanics. Conduct a spell check. Finally, thank the person you are writing to for his or her time and close in a professional manner. Closing without a signature might be misunderstood as rude.

Here are the key points for writing a successful e-mail to KU personnel or advisors:
• Identify the action item you want to occur as a result of the e-mail prior to writing it.
• Address personnel with the proper title or role to convey respect.
• Properly identify yourself by full name and course affiliation (if your question relates to a specific course).
• Provide any background information and establish the context necessary to understand the message.
• Write a clear and concise message.
• Write in a professional tone and avoid emotionally charged wording.
• Use proper grammar and punctuation, and conduct a spell check.
• Thank the person you are writing to and close appropriately.

Ultimately, your goal in writing an e-mail should be to keep the correspondence clear, concise, and polite, which will lead to successful communication overall.

COMPOSING E-MAIL TO OTHER STUDENTS
Kaplan University encourages students to communicate with each other in a professional and collegial manner. After all, you never know where you will end up or whom you will be working for or with some day. Additionally, networking can be a great advantage as students progress through their degree program; school contacts can foster long-term professional relationships that might lead to future opportunities. To effectively communicate with other students through e-mail, keep in mind that although the audience is not in the immediate vicinity, word choice, grammar, and punctuation are key to writing successful e-mails.

E-mail is one of the most effective tools to communicate today; however, like face-to-face communication, e-mail can often be miscon-
strued. Therefore, to communicate with other students effectively at Kaplan University, students should consider the following tips:

- Address peers by name and include a greeting; this can be more informal after you get to know the person. Until you do, however, always address them by at least their first name.
- Identify yourself by name and course; don’t assume they will know who you are.
- Use correct grammar and mechanics so that there is no misunderstanding.
- Use correct English (avoid the overuse of shortcuts that are used in texting).
- Be sure to use a friendly tone (emoticons in moderation are okay).
- Include a proper closing.

Corresponding with peers can be a rewarding experience and a great support system while you attend Kaplan University. E-mailing can be a successful mode of communication if you consider the way your message comes across to your audience. Being polite at all times can alleviate misconceptions and lead to a friendly, supportive, educational environment.
Being an online student has a great number of benefits. Many students claim that flexibility and convenience are important factors when choosing to pursue an online education; however, it is important to remember that while you are attending class from places such as your home, you are not alone. Kaplan University offers various ways to communicate with your classmates and your instructors as a means of building connections and positive working relationships. By taking advantage of these communication options, your professor and classmates are never far away.

AOL® Instant Messenger (AIM) is an important part of your experience as a student at Kaplan University. You can use this instant messaging tool to communicate in real time with your professors and fellow students. Typically, you will use AIM to communicate with your professors during their office hours, which are provided in the course syllabus. You can also use AIM to chat with fellow classmates, to work on projects, or just to get to know one another better. The following sections introduce you to the more common features of AIM as well as how to use the tool itself.

INTRODUCTION TO AIM
AIM is free software you can download from the Internet (go to http://www.aim.com).
When working with AIM, it is important to be familiar with several key terms, including the following:

- **Abbreviations**: Shorthand for common phrases that are used in chat, such as LOL for laughing out loud, BRB for be right back, and TY for thank you.
- **Away message**: A function that allows you to let others know when you are online but unavailable.
- **Buddy**: Someone who you have accepted an IM from and chat with.
- **Buddy information**: Editable information about users. Buddies can view each other’s information.
- **Buddy list**: The main communications hub of AIM. This is a list containing the status of buddies, such as whether they are online or away.
- **Emoticons**: Symbols that are used to convey certain emotions, such as :-) for a smiley face, or :-( for being sad or disappointed.
- **IM**: Instant message; this is a message that someone sends to you as part of a chat.
- **User**: You or anyone else who is using AIM.

**AIM ETIQUETTE**

The following are general etiquette guidelines when using AIM:

- **Choose an appropriate screen name**. Be sure that the screen name you choose is appropriate and conveys a professional image to your instructors and classmates. If you have an existing screen name that you are not sure about, it might be wise to create a new AIM screen name just for your Kaplan University use.

- **Consider the importance of the discussion**. AIM is a great tool, especially for short, informal conversations. When mat-
 ters are more significant or more extensive, consider another means of communication, such as the telephone or e-mail. You can always use AIM to ask professors to set up a time for a phone conversation.

- **Respond in a timely manner.** An AIM conversation is intended to be a series of short responses in a fairly quick manner between individuals. Long pauses or lapses in time can be seen as rude or frustrating. If you initiate or engage in a chat on AIM, it is courteous to give that person your full attention.

- **Use abbreviations and emoticons appropriately.** Many people are not completely familiar with all the abbreviations, acronyms and emoticons used in this type of communication, so use them carefully and only after ensuring that the individual with whom you are chatting knows what the abbreviation/emoticon stands for.

- **Use proper spelling and grammar.** Although not every response will be perfect, it is important to strive to put your best foot forward by using proper spelling and grammar. This also alleviates the problem of being misunderstood.

- **Use appropriate case of letters.** Using ALL CAPITAL LETTERS is the online equivalent of screaming. Similarly, AlTeRnAtInG bEtWeEn UpPeR aNd lOwErCaSe letters is difficult to read. It is best to use standard conventions for capitalization in instant messaging.

- **End conversations prior to leaving AIM.** It is polite to let the individual with whom you are communicating know that you are leaving the conversation. A simple, “I have to go now. See you later” will suffice.

**USING AIM TO COMMUNICATE WITH INSTRUCTORS**

Professors at Kaplan University may keep office hours, which are posted in your course syllabus, and during those hours, you should feel comfortable to use AIM to meet with them for any reason related
to school. AIM can be a useful tool for checking on an assignment due date or asking a question regarding an assignment.

When communicating with instructors, follow the previously outlined guidelines for etiquette; however, keep a few additional considerations in mind. First, remember that all conversations in AIM can be saved and later viewed, and possibly even forwarded to others. As such, the use of academic professionalism in your choice of words and topics of conversation is extremely important. Also, please keep in mind that specific questions regarding your grades might be more appropriately addressed in another medium, such as an e-mail or the telephone.

**USING AIM TO COMMUNICATE WITH CLASSMATES**

AIM can be a great option for communicating with your classmates. The main benefits include building a sense of community in the online environment and developing positive working relationships with one another.

Some students report feeling isolated in the online environment. Kaplan University utilizes a number of tools to reduce or eliminate feelings of isolation, of which AIM is one. Using AIM to form study groups with your classmates is one strategy for effectively using AIM, and it is also a great way to get to know your fellow students. When a number of students engage in activities such as a study group, a sense of community is fostered. By using other classroom elements, such as seminar and discussion, in addition to using AIM, it is quite possible to create an engaging and active online learning community. A learning community is characterized by mutual respect and a willingness to help one another. Online learning communities offer significant advantages to members, such as reducing or eliminating feelings of isolation, promoting academic risk-taking and knowledge sharing, and fostering a positive learning environment.