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4 Tips to Send (and Receive) Better Texts

Sure, hitting send is easy. But these tips can help make sure everyone's messages are coming across loud and clear.



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TEXTING IS COMMON, easy, and ubiquitous. After all, it's an easy (and, depending

on your wireless plan, probably free) way to keep up with friends and family. According to [research by the Pew Research Center on Technology and Internet](#), “text messaging is the most common non-voice application Americans use on their mobile phones. Some 73 percent of adult cell owners” text occasionally, at least, and on average we send or receive approximately 42 messages per day, with the more realistic median being 10 texts per day.

So if you're going to text, you may as well text well. You may do it already and roll your eyes at the idea of “texting tips,” or maybe you keep your texts short because you don't know how they'll be read. It's OK, but your texts actually could impact your relationships. A study [by doctors at UC Berkeley](#) asserted that receiving and sending text messages can boost your overall happiness and feelings of well-being, probably because you're staying connected with someone you want to talk to.

Texts can make us *feel*, and we all know how badly an errant period or exclamation mark can change the meaning of a message, and even if you send hundreds a day and do it all the time, these tips might help.

There Are No Rules. Be Yourself

Although there are plenty of “dos and don'ts” of texting, just note that there are no real rules. Some people may wish there were, but there aren't. This [guide to texting](#) addresses the basics—write clearly; be yourself; be direct; double-check your text; follow up if you don't hear back; be careful with spell check and dictating; write out words, not emojis; and respond promptly.

Leora Trub, a psychologist at Pace University, says that if her clients have issues with texting, she asks them to be mindful of their needs and the needs of the person with whom they're texting. She doesn't prescribe texting rules, so spend less time worrying if what you're doing is “right” or “wrong” and more time having fun communicating. That's your first step.

You may want to be mindful while you text though. According to Trub, “mindful texting” means the person texting does so from the perspective of their needs and wants while being empathetic toward the person they are communicating with. This style is more direct, with clear messages that are more honest and open. Trub states that “by having perspective and being mindful when sending texts, texts are less like texts and more like conversations.”

Stick to Lighter Topics

Trub advises that texting about lighter topics is best. New York psychologist Heather Silvestri agrees. “Texting is good for lighter topics and to provide

logistical information. More difficult and heavier conversations should be done in person or over the phone.”

In an article for *Psychology Today*, psychologist Jennifer Gilbert writes that you should “stick to light topics. It’s hard to type out long detailed conversations on text, and a lot of subtlety gets lost.” Texting doesn’t have the social cues of in-person communication, so it’s easy for messages to be misinterpreted. And this is why it’s best to share simple and straightforward information, such as logistical details and/or fun emojis and light-hearted messages by text.

Gilbert also understands that texting could be hard for anyone, especially if it's not your preferred form of communication. In the same article, she writes, “It’s not the same as face-to-face conversations because so many of the signals you’d get in real life are missing from text. There are big pauses, people can be away and not respond quickly, and you can’t see facial expressions or body language.”

If You’re Not Sure, Mirror Your Recipient

Silvestri has a surefire way to determine if you’re texting properly. “Mirror the texting styles of the person with whom you’re texting.” She adds, “If those with whom you text always respond with simple one-liners or ‘k,’ then you should mirror their concise, succinct communication styles.”

Trub’s research also found that mirroring similar text styles is important. In an article for the American Psychological Association, Trub writes that “People who described their partner as having a similar texting style to themselves reported greater relationship satisfaction,” so couples who text, and have similar texting styles, actually wind up feeling more content in their relationship, whether they're texting love notes or complaining about work (or each other.)

Punctuation and Grammar Count, Just Not the Way You Think



According to [Celia Klin, associate professor of psychology at Binghamton University](#), “If you don’t want to send the wrong message, watch how you punctuate your texts.” She’s studied—in detail—the way that punctuation affects the way texts are received by others. Her findings? Beware of periods. Surprisingly, her study found that if you end a text message with a period, your text could be perceived as less sincere than messages that don’t. In follow-up work, Klin’s team found that a text response [with an exclamation mark](#) is interpreted as more, rather than less, sincere.

Klin further states in the study that texting lacks social cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, or eye gaze, things you may know, but are important to remember. Texters replace these cues with emojis, misspellings that replace speech sounds, and creative punctuation, so don't over police your friends' grammar.

In [a conversation with NPR](#) about her work, Klin says that her texting study sparked outrage among grammar die-hards, who interpreted her findings as an excuse for some kind of slow deterioration of the English language. According to Klin, however, the entire debate demonstrates that language is constantly changing—and that’s OK. “Isn’t it great that we are so linguistically flexible and creative,” she says.

Finally, for the nervous or uninitiated, there are more than a few useful guides to help you decipher texting language and slang. Grammarly has [a list of texting abbreviations](#) to help, and Wikipedia has a much longer guide at the end of [this “SMS Language” article](#).

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