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## Laughing My A\*\* Off: An Intergenerational Essay Regarding Texting Lingo and New-Age Technologies

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2015

## Laughing My A\*\* Off An intergenerational essay regarding texting lingo and new-age technologies

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**Laughing My A\*\* Off**  
***An intergenerational essay regarding texting lingo***  
***and new-age technologies***

Sage Newell

*Ella V. Schwing Award Winner*



“Idk, but i’m off to your lil bro’s bball game. ttfn! luv ya!!” my mom responds to my Facebook-message-inquiry. She rarely capitalizes a word at the beginning of a sentence and almost always leaves the ending unpunctuated, which makes me cringe slightly. I inhale deeply and reply, “Ok, Mom—have a great time! Love!” Her next “sentence” makes me involuntarily shake my head: “Lol, thnx. xoxo <3.” While I understand these sorts of messages and texts, I’ve never particularly warmed to them. Something within me is bound to correct grammar and punctuation, while my mom, younger brother, and two younger sisters can somehow manage to speak as though vowels are an optional part of words, or as if every phrase can be abbreviated into three letters. Communication through this form of *texting lingo* is something that my generation has adopted as a way of distinguishing itself from other, less technologically advanced generations. Through the intergenerational comparison of experiences with this language, I’m hoping to gain insight that will help me answer a biting question: *Why does texting lingo piss me off so much?*

The day my mom decided to get a texting package on her phone, she came home and said, “Ok, I’m gonna go upstairs. You text me from down here—that way I can *learn!*” Shortly after sending her the first text from our living room, I heard her yell down the stairs, “Now... where’s the smiley-face button?” Needless to say, my mom was

slightly less technology-adept than I was at the time. I'm not claiming, though, that I was (or am) tech-savvy by any means, but texting culture became a huge part of my generation, and I learned quickly to fit in. It wasn't long before my mom was using texts to communicate more often than I was. Around the same time, she created a Facebook account and "friended" me—another way to stay in touch, especially after I left Oregon for college. "It keeps you close to home," my mom explained. I noticed that, not long after she made these social-cultural decisions, she began using texting lingo—and even the unnecessary misspelling of words—in her messages. "Enough" became "enuff." "Little" became "lil." Punctuation became nonexistent, and the common abbreviation "LOL" (for "laugh out loud") often appeared in her messages.

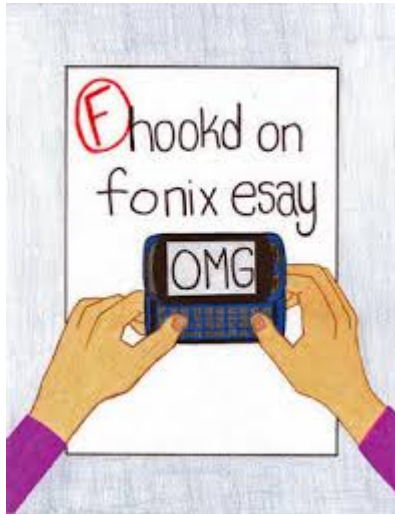
I've never told my mom before that these kinds of things eat away at my soul. I've gotten used to biting my tongue, grinning, and bearing it. Besides, I'm not a grammar-Nazi; aside from the occasional correction of others' misusing *your* vs. *you're*, I'd rather let bygones be bygones.



The question as to why this new way of communicating gets under my skin has always been sort of a mystery to me. My mom, an expert on the topic, suggested that my ability to write eloquently plays a big role in it. "You've always been a very skilled typist," she explained. "Writing short stories and bending phrases is something you used to do for fun. It's possible that, because of your ability to type essays out in the speed of light, you have become adverse to shortening phrases and misusing proper etiquette." She has a point. Since I was in high school, my relationship with Facebook included sharing my prose and short stories with friends via the "notes" application. I've always been able to run my mouth for hours, coming up with new ideas to jot down in witty ways, and composition classes have always been my favorite because they give my fingers a chance to click away at a keyboard. It's possible that my distaste for texting lingo stems from my love of saying everything in a full, clear way, using rich vocabulary to bring power to my ideas.

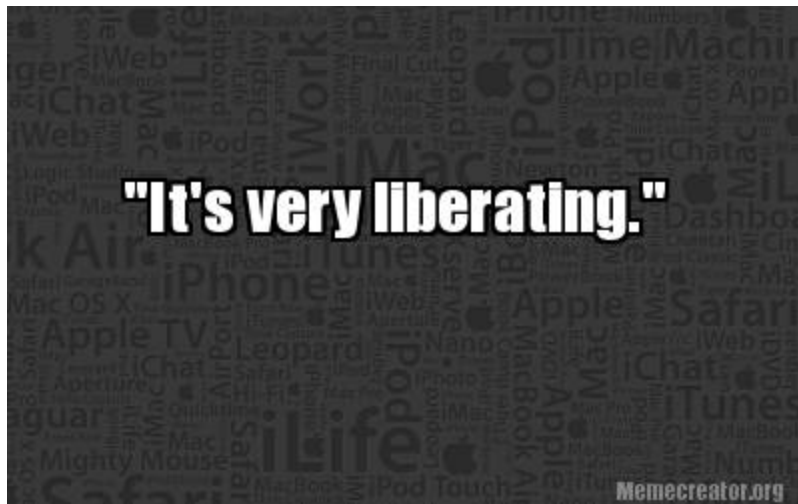
Another probable factor in my overt hatred of abbreviated communication is that some of the texting lingo has leaked into non-digital conversation. Teenagers learn more quickly through social interaction than they do in a classroom setting, and so the language that they learn first and foremost tends to be texting lingo. While it makes some

logical sense to abbreviate “laughing my a\*\* off” to “lmao” in texts so that the characters are limited and it takes less effort to type out, actually *saying* “lmao” out loud sounds ridiculous because it takes just about as much time and effort to say the whole phrase. I sincerely believe that, because of this abbreviated communication, my generation (and those following it) are slowly getting dumber.



However much I disdain texting lingo as a language, I can't deny that it brings some merit to the new-age realm of communication. The use of certain abbreviations and terms in texting and over Facebook messaging can be used to distinguish any person from another. Every person has their own style, determined by the amount of texting lingo they introduce into their vocabulary. Imagine a spectrum with perfect English at one extreme and complete texting lingo at the other. Every person who texts and/or uses Facebook messaging falls somewhere along that spectrum. In this way, each person's distinct voice can be mapped out, which is useful in determining the authenticity of any one person's statements. For example, if I were to communicate with my mom on Facebook and all of her sentences were capitalized, punctuated, emoticon-free and abbreviation-free, I could deduce that either something is very wrong or that it is not my mom to whom I am communicating.

Aside from identification purposes, texting lingo can be used to cinch the gap between generations. "It's very liberating," my mom explained during her interview. "Being able to spell creatively allows me to feel youthful, as well as use the left side of my brain. I like being able to spell any way I choose." My mom is one of the most highly coveted substitute teachers in Eugene, Oregon, and one of the reasons why is that she is able to really connect to the younger generations she teaches. I believe this has to do with her style, her voice—and that comes out in her use of texting lingo.



Essentially, texting lingo is a factor that distinguishes my generation but is not always used as often by us. Instead, it serves as a way to create new styles and voices to speak with, giving an aspect of creativity to everyday digital conversation. Although I despise the use of texting lingo as a language, I understand the properties of it that are colorful, which actually give our new age of technology a defining characteristic in the realm of communication.



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