Editor's Note

A profile of a trend, such as a persuasive argument about a particular technology or social trend, includes elements of the rhetoric paper, especially the need for sources as evidence to back up claims. How does Aaron Steinkraus use sources and evidence? How are quotations introduced in this essay? What kind of qualifications do Steinkraus' sources have, and how is that authority represented?

How does the essay's title fit in with the essay? How might more "txting" attributes be incorporated into this paper?

Texting has become an obsession for many of us. This timely essay brings up multiple issues for discussion. When is it appropriate to use informal writing? Consider what kind of communication challenges texting might cause for non-texters. Examine how texting might affect language: Is it evolution or destruction? Is there a "time and place" for texting? Discuss the idea of "cutting a message down"—when is this dangerous?

Can Txting Benefit Engl?

Aaron Steinkraus

As the world moves into the twenty-first century, technology becomes more and more advanced, especially in the field of communications. Satellites allow us to instantly connect to and talk with people on the other side of the globe from any location on the planet. Texting in particular, has become one of the most popular new mediums of communication and has created a number of controversies. The effect of texting on students' abilities to use the standard conventions of English is the greatest of these controversies. Does texting diminish a student's spelling and grammar? Does it signify a lack of proper education? Or, does it allow students to express their creativity and use another, viable language that does not follow the set conventions of English but still conveys the author's message?

Text messaging first emerged in the 1990s and over the next decade exploded in popularity, reaching a position as one of the most prominent forms of communication. While most people believe teens comprise the majority of people whom text, David Crystal, an honorary professor of linguistics at Bango University, found out that "adults and organizations send 80 percent of text messages" (qtd. in Lepkowaska). Now teens, along with adults, send messages filled with abbreviations, such as 'lol' ('laugh out loud'), 'ttyl' ('talk to you later'), 'btw' ('by the way'), along with a multitude of other text shorthand, find their way onto cell phone screens the world over. According to Nick Seaton, a member of the Campaign for Real Education, "Now

text messaging is with us and we can't get rid of it" (qtd. in Lepkowska). So does this form of communicating bring anything constructive to the table when it comes to writing convention?

Although many people view texting as the bane of proper English, it has much to offer. For one thing, texting teaches students to write more concisely. In a text interview with Vanessa Menchaca, an avid texter who will attend Boston College in the fall for business, she remarked on her views of texting: "u dont have long txts instead u get to the point." Menchaca makes a valid point because text messages limit the sender to only a hundred and sixty characters. For that reason, texters don't waste time with including extra words. Texters negate cluttered messages by avoiding excessive words, focusing on the minimum information necessary to convey the point. Becoming proficient in the concision texting promotes can prove useful to engineers and others who find themselves writing project proposals or other such propositions where concision is vital. Whether by using abbreviations or by speaking in incomplete sentences, texting cuts a message down to the bare minimum requirement needed to effectively express the author's purpose, without excessive wordiness that can cause confusion and fatigue.

This philosophy of removing "unnecessary" components goes beyond the words in a text message. The use of abbreviations and the removal of letters from words create their own special influence on the English used in texting. According to Dr. Beverly Plester, who lectures on psychology at Coventry University, "A lot of textism is written phonetically" which can "[improve] both their reading and writing skills" (qtd. in Lepkowska). When children first learn to spell, teachers tell them to "sound it out" and they have taken that to heart. Instead of trying to deal with the complexities of Standard English, students decided to sound out the words they want to use and create their own spelling, one that streamlines the word, so as to not waste space. Students express themselves in their own unique style of writing and "show huge invention in coming up with ways of getting their message across." Plester found that there is "a causal relationship between text and improving language learning" (qtd. in Lepkowska). Menchaca also stated, "I can no longer take notes the same way. just tooo many words." Many students will agree with Menchaca's statement because we find ourselves in the situation where a teacher covers a lot of material at once and the only way to absorb the information is to jot down quick notes. It doesn't matter that the note-taker misspelled the words or that it appears to be an incoherent grouping of words, as long as he or she can understand what he wrote, the method works. Should this form of shorthand be considered unacceptable because of its improper grammar and spelling or should it be allowed because it effectively facilitates the need of the author?

Not everyone will agree that texting helps improve students' learning capabilities. In fact, many people openly oppose texting and the conventions it uses. One such person is Ruth Eversley, an English teacher in Oldham, England, who, in an article titled "Texting has Taken Away our Capitals" shows her disgust for texting's lack of usage of capitals. She goes as far as to blame students' deficiency in using capitals on "the curse of the text message." While copious in many text messages, this error can easily be remedied in the classroom, albeit a little extra effort is required on the part of the teacher and student alike. But the effect of texting proves more important as Eversley goes on to say, "for the first time, many of these young people …are writing for fun" (Eversley). Eversley realizes the importance of students increasing their exposure to writing. Most English teachers would be excited if they heard their students would write for fun because the more a student writes, whether for fun or for work, he or she becomes aware of subjects such as context and clearly conveying his thoughts.

Another accusation against the institution of texting comes from Seaton, who believes that "text messaging is having a detrimental effect on the way young people communicate" (qtd. in Lepkowska). At the core of this belief, spelling. When most people think of text messages, they envision horribly misspelled words and improper grammar. As Seaton puts it, "It does not require people to know precise spelling because they can just make it up." I asked Coleen Gravem, a freshman Agriculture Business major here at Cal Poly, how she thought text messaging affected students' writing. Although Gravem admits to not reading many student papers, she has inferred its effects from her experiences in school. Gravem gave the same impression as Seaton that people who text don't know how to use proper spelling and grammar. Although Gravem texts on a regular basis, she abstains from using abbreviations and goes as far as to proofread her text messages before sending them in order to ensure clarity. Gravem acts as proof to the misconception that most texts use improper spelling and grammar. In the course of Crystal's research, for his book *txting: the gr8 db8*, he discovered that the majority of texts "were written in standard English and without any abbreviations" (qtd. in Lepkowska). But what about the minority who use abbreviations? Does their use of shorthand have a negative impact on their literary abilities?

Those who use shorthand in their writing will not be able to change their habits immediately, nor should they. Even if people used abbreviations in their texts "people have to be highly literate to know how to abbreviate a word so the recipient knows what they mean." If a person abbreviates a word, but no one knows what the word is, the student must resend a text to clarify the word. This forces them to think carefully before using a text to make sure that they don't lose comprehension. Menchaca alluded to the confusion that appears around texts by providing an abbreviation, such as "ass." which can abbreviate either "'assumption' or 'assess.'" This abbreviation

would prove problematic because of the duality it shares with both words. This would require someone to think up a different abbreviation for one or both of the words. As Crystal points out, "To do this effectively, they must know how to spell a word and be able to use it in the correct context" (qtd. in Lepkowska). So when Seaton makes the accusation that texters can make up their own spelling for words, he does not take into account that people use modified spelling to convey their meaning through words that are shortened to fit in the limited spacing of texts, sounding phonetically correct, and carrying the original meaning of the word. In order to accomplish these criteria, one cannot just make up one's own spelling. One must carefully choose how one writes a word in order to avoid losing clarity.

Texting has proven an effective form of communication. But circumstance may dictate its appropriateness. I am the first to agree that texting has its time and place. At some level of formality a line must be drawn. Ian McNeilly, director of the National Association for the Teaching of English, recognizes this and "is worried that a growing number of people are failing to distinguish what forms of language should be used—and when" (qtd. in Lepkowska). I am sure the majority of people will agree that the use of texting and abbreviations in a scholarly journal or other situations in a professional environment would seem out of place and inept. At the same time texting seems perfectly normal among friends and in social conditions. This leaves one arena that acts as ground zero for all the debate: schools. Mark Rogers, an English Teacher at The Jo Richardson Community School, believes "it is up to teachers to ensure that young people know how to adapt our language to their needs" (qtd. in Lepkowska). Rogers hits the point right on the head. Teachers who try to force students to completely abandon texting will find their efforts futile. Texting has become a part of the culture for this generation. Teachers must ensure that students learn the appropriateness of when and when not to use texting and abbreviations. As Ms Klacey, a member of the National Literacy Association, puts it, "I have never seen text abbreviation creep into formal work or essays that pupils have submitted, so they clearly know when it's appropriate to use it" (qtd. in Lepkowska). And as long as teachers emphasize the difference between formal and informal, texting is transformed into a valuable learning tool and a creative outlet for teenagers and adults alike.

Whether texting will ever become academically acceptable or not is hard to tell. However, what is clear is that texting provides students with a style of their own and makes them excited about writing, even if it is in short bursts and for entertainment. Texting requires those who use it to attain a familiarity with a range of words and compels them to examine the context in which they use their abbreviations and shorthand in order to avoid loss of comprehension. I am not saying that texting is without its flaws. Gravem notes that with texting one loses the personal feel

that one experiences when talking on the phone. And I will agree that texting will never be able to replace human contact, but "the real test is whether you can be understood" and at this texting seems to excel (Pearce 8). So whether you are talking with a friend in class or a parent in military service on the opposite side of the globe, texting provides a medium with which students and adults alike can effectively convey their thoughts and ideas. C ya and ttyl.

Aaron Steinkraus is a mechanical engineering major.

Works Cited

Eversley, Ruth. "Texting has Taken Away our Capitals." *News & Views*. May 2006. 29 April 2009 < http://www.its-ltd.net/May2006.pdf>.

Gravem, Coleen. Personal interview. 28 April 2009.

Lepkowska, Dorothy. "English – 2 Txt or not 2 Txt." *TES Magazine*. 6 Feb. 2009. 28 April 2009 < http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6008382>.

Menchaca, Vanessa. Text interview. 30 April 2009.

Pearce, Judith. "Was Shakespeare a Bad Speller? OR, Has Txt Kild the Ritn Wd?" Keynote Speech AISA. Conferences. Mbabane and Kampala. October 2008.