

# Tips for Texting Students and Parents

## Purpose of the Tool

The following list of best practices for texting students and parents was compiled by experts at Signal Vine, a text messaging provider that works with many colleges, school districts, and community-based organizations nation-wide. These tips are intended to provide additional context for practitioners when devising text messaging calendars, schedules, and content.



### 1 Frequency

The recommended number of prescheduled or programmed messages is 2-5 per month. We discourage more than that, but strongly encourage back-and-forth conversation if a student replies to the message.

### 2 Personalization

Make sure that the messages are personalized and include relevant student information (e.g., student's first name, grade, school, etc.) and the counselor/advisor's name, especially in the first message. The more personalized the message, the higher the response rate.

### 3 Relevancy

The content of the messages should be relevant to the particular recipient's needs. Colleges often filter messages to only those students who meet certain criteria that would make the message relevant. We strongly discourage mass texting where everyone receives the same message.

### 4 Action

Include "calls to action" in the text messages that will nudge students and/or parents to complete their necessary tasks or to take an action which moves forward in the process. For example, you might include a short link (e.g., bit.ly or goo.gl) to a resource or have a student respond back to answer a question about their progress.

### 5 Urgency

When possible, create urgency by using dates and sending messages about 3 days prior to deadlines. Make sure that you send the message on a date that is not too close to the deadline (so recipients aren't overwhelmed) but that also is not too far away from the deadline (so they don't forget about the deadline).

### 6 Timing

Timing can impact the rate of student responses to text messages. During the school year, K-12 students reply most frequently before school (7am) or after school (4-7pm). College student messaging should begin between 10-11am; the lunch hour is popular and we have found no need for class-day limitations.

### 7 Interactive

Ensure that the conversations are two-way and interactive, and that counselors are responding to students' messages by answering questions in a timely manner. Prepare staff to monitor/reply to messages the hour after a programmed message is sent. Most student replies will be sent back within the first 15 minutes.

### 8 Programmed

Productivity increases when time is spent up-front to design a program of messages around key dates, which reduces the pressure on staff to remember when to engage specific students. We have seen a 4x-10x increase in counselor capacity when they are able to readily respond to student replies from programmed messages.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

## Tips for Texting Students and Parents (cont.)

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### 9 Opt-Out

Recipients need to be able to opt out of receiving text messages. In the first message, let students know that they always have the option to text back STOP or CANCEL to stop receiving messages. They can always opt back in at a later time and start receiving text messages again.

### 10 Introduction

It's best to begin the engagement with an introduction message that introduces the counselor and solidifies the connection. We also recommend that you suggest students save the number and text anytime they need help.

### 11 Prepared Responses

To further productivity, prepare responses to common or anticipated questions in advance to avoid duplicative or inconsistent work on behalf of staff.

### 12 Prepared Links

Often students would be best suited to utilize an online resource, rather than including all of the content in a text. Make these links readily available for counselors to send students to improve productivity and responsiveness.

### 13 Link Shortening

When including web links, we find using a link shortener like bit.ly or goo.gl to be useful in conserving characters in programmed messages.

### 14 Less is More

The 160-character limit can be challenging for some organizations that want to send two- and three-part messages. Do not exceed the 160 character limit: the process of honing the content of a text message down to its main point ensures students are able to digest the content quickly.

### 15 10-Digit Personal Touch

Although short codes (3-6 digit numbers) are popular for marketing companies and some may consider sending texts via email (from an email address), students are most likely to trust a 10-digit phone number.

### 16 Ad-Hoc Messages

Programmed messages can only cover the expected communications, so counselors should text students with one-off, ad-hoc messages as necessary. This keeps the texting informal and relevancy high.

### 17 Ask Questions

The best interactions happen when you ask students a question that invites a response. Messages that contain questions have 30%-40% higher response rates, and they are a great way to get information from students.

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### **18 Limited Automation**

There is value in automating some student messages, but students are perceptive and therefore quickly recognize when a “computer” has taken over the conversation. We generally advise no more than 2-3 automated messages in a row if you’re looking to keep the relationship personal.

### **19 Group Messaging**

Messaging students in large groups may save time up-front, but it’s important that each message is still sent one-on-one to avoid unintended connections being made between text message recipients.

### **20 Multi-language for Parents**

When messaging parents, determining the parent’s language of choice is important when engaging them, or you can give them an option to select their native language.