

## Essential Question: What are the norms of positive online communication?

### Learning Overview and Objectives

*Overview:* Students will learn the forms and norms of effective communication in an online context.

Students begin by role-playing greetings to various types of people (e.g., grandma, teacher, best friend) to demonstrate that there are different norms about how to interact with different people. They engage in a dramatic reading of written online transcripts, such as an email exchange or IM chat between two people. Finally, they work with a partner to identify ways that we modify communication based on the audience, context, and purpose.

#### objectives

*Students will:*

- Learn how to effectively analyze online communications, identifying their form, audience, and purpose
- Recognize that not understanding the forms and norms of online communication can lead to misunderstandings and even ill will
- Be able to modify their forms and norms of communication, both digital and print, depending on the audience

### Materials and Preparation

*Materials*

- **Mystery Transcripts Student Handout**
- **Mystery Transcripts Student Handout – Teacher Version**

*Preparation*

- Make copies of the **Mystery Transcripts Student Handout**
- Review the **Mystery Transcripts Student Handout – Teacher Version**

*Parent Resources*

- Send home the **Connected Culture Parent Tip Sheet**
- Send home the **Connected Culture Parent/Teacher Intro Video**

**Forms and Norms**  
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### Key Vocabulary

- **Form:** Things of a similar type that are components of a group. Online, forms of communication we use, such as IM, chat, email, and text.
- **Norm:** Standards and expectations. Norms of communication online influence vocabulary, slang, sentence structure, spelling, grammar, punctuation, tone, etc.
- **Transcript:** A record of someone’s conversation
- **Emoticon:** A graphic used to symbolize emotion online
- **Internet Slang:** Common terms, abbreviations, and acronyms used online

## teaching plans

### Introduce

**EXPLAIN** that when we communicate using the Internet, cell phones, or mobile devices, it is sometimes hard to know what is appropriate to say or write, given our different audiences.

**PROVIDE** this example: *You would probably use a different form (email, IM) and a different norm (standard and expectation for communication) if you were emailing with your teacher than if you were texting with a friend about an assignment.*

**REVIEW** the Key Vocabulary with students, making sure to define the words “form” and “norm.”

In short, people communicate in different ways depending on:

- The form used
- The norms that are expected
- The audience (to whom we are speaking)
- The purpose of the communication

**PAIR** students to do a short role-play exercise in which they explore norms of communication. Have one member of each pair role-play how someone their age might greet one of the following people after not seeing him or her for a long time. Students can take turns playing different characters. When students are finished, ask for a few pairs to demonstrate.

- Grandmother
- Best friend
- Teacher

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**ASK** *What are some general characteristics of how kids might communicate when they are:*

Texting their friends?

Sample responses:

- *Lowercase letters*
- *Informal tone and incomplete sentences*
- *Abbreviations and Internet slang (e.g., LOL)*
- *Emoticons*
- *Assuming kids know what's being referred to (incomplete context)*

Writing assignments for class?

Sample responses:

- *Paragraph structure*
- *Standard grammar and spelling*
- *Formal tone and complete sentences*
- *Need to explain fully what's going on (complete context)*

Making a comment on a public message board?

Sample responses:

- *Would identify who I'm responding to by pasting in their post before my response*
- *Probably not be too familiar in tone*
- *Would reveal little or no personal information*

## Teach 1: Analyze Transcripts

**GUIDE** students to analyze written transcripts of communications that have taken place over digital media. Pass out copies of the **Mystery Transcripts Student Handout**, which is a set of three transcripts. **DIVIDE** the class into pairs, and ask each pair to fill out the **Mystery Transcripts Student Handout**, in which they must identify who the speakers in the conversation are, identify communication forms and norms, and figure out the purpose of the conversation. Refer to the **Mystery Transcripts Student Handout – Teacher Version** for guidance on how to analyze the three transcripts.

For each transcript:

- **INVITE** students to read the script aloud to the class
- **CALL FOR** each pair to analyze all three transcripts, identifying how different speakers, forms and norms, and purposes create completely different kinds of communication
- **ASK** students to consider the ways they agreed or disagreed about the identity of the communicators, codes and conventions used, or the purpose of the conversation

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## Teach 2: Modify Transcripts

**GUIDE** students to modify their transcripts. Ask students to alter one of the three transcripts to another form and with another audience in mind. Refer to the **Mystery Transcripts Student Handout – Teacher Version** for direction.

## Wrap Up and Assess

Use the modified transcript that students have produced to assess their understanding of the lesson objectives. Review the following key points with students to assess their grasp of these objectives.

**ASK** *What factors should we consider as we communicate in online settings?* (The standards and social norms given the form or type of communication.)

**ASK** *How might your communication change for:*

- *A blog entry for class* (Might include complete sentences and no personal information, but with a tone that is a bit conversational and inviting for others to participate.)
- *An email to your teacher asking for help on homework* (Polite, including greetings and official signoff.)
- *A text to your mom or dad asking if you can stay after school* (Conversational, but with only the simplest Internet abbreviations.)
- *An Instant Message to your best friend asking what they want for lunch* (Shorthand, informal, incomplete sentences.)

Explain that effective communicators change, shift, and adapt their forms and norms depending on the audience, purpose, and context of their message. People online generally cannot see your facial expressions or hear your tone of voice. They have only two ways of judging what you’re thinking: One way is by the words you choose; the other is by the manners you use. It is therefore important to choose what you say wisely.



## Extension Activity

Students translate common online shorthand and “text speak” for parents and teachers. They brainstorm five to seven phrases that kids might text or IM to one another that might confuse parents. They “translate” these phrases for parents or teachers and provide definitions for terms. Phrases should be longer than just “TTYL,” for instance, since we want the translation not to just involve spelling out an acronym.



# Forms and Norms

## Lesson Plan

### Alignment with Standards — National Educational Technology Standards for Students<sup>®</sup> 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007):

#### 1. Creativity and Innovation

Students demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology. Students:

- a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes
- b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression

#### 2. Communication and Collaboration

Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others. Students:

- a. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats
- b. contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems

#### 4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

Students use critical-thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources. Students:

- a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation
- b. plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project
- c. use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions

#### 5. Digital Citizenship

Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior. Students:

- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
- b. exhibit a positive attitude towards using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity