

Excerpt of "The Joy of Text," by Kristina Grish

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Ask any girl what she wants from a man, and she'll say that beyond diamonds and morning sex, she needs to be understood. We want guys to appreciate us, to listen to us, to just get it already—without having to explain every thought and feeling. We don't have time to spell it all out, and if we do make the effort, our audience must be captive and worth it.

Thank Cupid that Technology Gods have rescued us from our stalled, confused love lives by giving us so many new ways to share what we mean, feel and want! Or, um, have they? Email, texts, PDAs and IMs intend to better bond our randy global village—and in many cases, they succeed. But we've also communicated thus far without a gatekeeper...and sometimes in lieu of real-life encounters. While there's something wild about flirting in a limitless world that lacks rules, boundaries or watchdogs, with this mystery comes an unwieldy free-for-all in the understanding department. And if you think about it, that means the only men who can really piece together our various thoughts and identities are hackers, IT experts and postmasters who return salacious emails. (And I'm not even sure the last one's a person.)

That said, here are eight must-type tips for using tech in your relationship. Massage his contraptions the right way, and you'll speak the same language in no time.

1. Memorize the techno-relating hierarchy. All men like phone calls, eventually—yet because we covet alternative mediums like IM and email, a ringing phone's now become the Holy Grail of connection (even if we do screen first). The scale looks like this:
 - Personal emails
 - Work email
 - Instant Message
 - Text Message
 - Voice Mail
 - Phone Call
2. Match mediums when you communicate. So if he calls you, then you call back. If he emails you, email him back. Now if he texts, and then you call, that's great too—but only because it's a communication upgrade. As long as your return is of equal value or you're moving up the hierarchy, you won't appear disinterested or passive aggressive.
3. Know your audience. This way, you can anticipate how you'll address a man and how he might respond. Never make sweeping generalizations about his place in the world simply because he boasts certain technologies. If a dapper fellow has the newest camera/phone/cappuccino maker combo, don't assume he's rich, status-conscious and metrosexual. Men of all ages and incomes love cargo—and if we only used favorite toys to nail a guy's persona, a trust-fund teen may seem no different than a 40 year-old CEO.
4. Never return a drunk text—especially if you've nipped at the bottle, too. (This also makes drunk texts a no-go.) Because techno-relating already creates instant intimacy, and booze already makes you want to suck face with strangers, you'll be passed out in a man's lap before he has time to hail you a cab home. Unlike a booty call, in which your conscience has to talk to (and hear the plea of) a desperate partner, booty texts are sent without spoken words. Your ears can't cue your conscience about this bad idea, so your judgment is even more impaired. The evidence is also permanent and forward-able. If drunk texts lead to hard-core flirting but no physical connection, embarrassments are two-fold: 1) They create a disconnect between the online and off-line persona you hope to establish;

- and 2) They leave a visible record on both your phone and his, of just how blasted, reckless and wretched you were the night before. I'm not sure which is worse.
5. Watch your salutations and sign-offs—and be emotionally exact with your words. Formalities (“Dear,” “Hello,” “Mr.”) don’t work unless you’re acting glib. Never coin a nickname he doesn’t use himself. Watch terms of endearment: “Babe,” “Hot Stuff” and similarly lax titles earn a smile, but venture into Love Muffin land, and he’ll freeze up (or barf). When signing off, don’t be too affectionate—but also not so dismissive as to ignore a farewell altogether. Say goodbye to “Sincerely,” “Yours Truly” and “Best.” “Yours,” “Bye” and “Mwa” balance friend and more. And unless you’ve said the word “love” in person, avoid one-offs like “luv” or “luv ya”—as well as the popular x, xx, xox, symbols. Tic-tac-toe marks confuse the hell out of men unless you really mean them.
 6. Never share passwords, no matter how close you are. Hoarding tech info is about privacy, and every relationship needs it. Give your guy the keys to your place, his own drawer, even a shelf in the bathroom—but keep all passwords to yourself. This has little to do with trust, and everything to do with maintaining your own sense of technical independence and freedom. Besides, you know that if he so much as glances at one of your notes, the chances of him confusing a joke or reference is all too possible. Just like the telephone game you played as a kid, he’s going to get your girlfriend gossip all wrong. That is, if he’s not horrified by how much personal info you share first.
 7. No fighting! Instead, send a note that says you need to get something off your chest—and wait to send it. Give yourself time to cool off, walk away from the message and reread it an hour later after you’ve gulped fresh air or eaten a banana to boost your blood sugar. Do you still feel the same way? Remember that when you send a feisty message, you’re not screaming at a machine. Your recipient is a live, emotional person that reacts in the moment as strongly as you might. If you can’t resist a first cyber punch, realize that with the start of a fight comes the obligation to finish the conversation. Unlike an in-person talk, techno-relating gives you the option of spewing a message and then shutting down. Signing-off during a tense IM moment is the tech equivalent of slamming a door. An online argument is not a one-way “Screw you” with the sadistic perk of watching him squirm with future “Did you get my note?” follow-ups. Save confrontations for live encounters to read and gauge body language. When you argue in person, you cut conversation time in half since you have more to go on than words.
 8. Learn damage control. Whether you accidentally forward him an email chain of personal problems or send a flirty text intended for another guy, you’ve got some explaining to do—and fast. Don’t ignore it or wait for the angry, hurt or confused response. Don’t play it cool either. Instead, behave like a spaz, because the best thing he can think is that you have too much on your mind to know what you’re saying—and to whom. You’re busy! You’re scatterbrained! You didn’t mean to call him John, when his name is Jay! To make nice, do so in the same medium in which you made the mistake. To move up the techno-relating hierarchy is to say that you’re so crippled with guilt that you’re thinking too hard about his feelings. Your goal is to demonstrate that you’re in ten places at once, and you only have time to zap a quick reply on a medium that’s already at your fingertips. With this in mind, send a brief but sincere apology. Your honesty, brevity, humor and haphazard attitude will help him blow off the situation—and look forward to how you’ll make it up to him.