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Textual Relations

By Reb Stevenson

U R hot. Want 2 go out l8r? J xox

If you are getting a text like that, you're one lucky duck.

For the rest of you, textuality is a guessing game that's even more stressful than a multiple choice Mongolian History exam you didn't study for.

Does he like you or not?! Yesterday he texted back in a nanosecond, but today he's only offering one-word answers. You've passed your cell around to a dozen girlfriends but their mixed assessments have only resulted in more confusion.

Are you just a freak who is reading in too much? Not necessarily.

"Paying attention to how much a person contacts you - whether in person or by email, phone or indeed texting - sheds light on their intentions toward you," says Dr. Bella Ellwood-Clayton, a sexual anthropologist and expert on the relationship between love and technology.

Also, tone can be very revealing. "Texts with someone you're into contain spark and surprises while platonic texts are often humdrum," she says.

Here are some common scenarios, and how to decode them:

His constant texts make your phone beep like a heart monitor

He likes you. He really, really likes you!

You only receive a smattering of texts

He either sleeps a LOT or he's emotionally ambivalent.

You have sore thumbs; his are lounging by the pool

"If you're always the one texting the other person, watch out," says Ellwood-Clayton. "It is likely their heart is set on another."

He responds two seconds after you hit "send"

It could be that he's just got nimble digits and nothing to do. However, Ellwood-Clayton maintains that when someone likes you, they're more apt to respond quickly. But don't get all tragic if your text is met with prolonged silence.

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"For those with a little more experience in the battlefield of love, sometimes purposely holding off replying to the person you're dying to reply to is used as a strategic move," she says.

You're getting those "good night" and "good morning" texts

Time of day messages definitely demonstrate care –but to what degree? Ellwood-Clayton says there isn't a definitive answer.

"If a guy you like is texting you "sweet dreams" each night, however, you can pretty much deduce, he's seriously smitten," she says.

He cyber-grunts

Don't take curt, two-character responses to heart. Maybe he's just a cave man who is more comfortable with a club than a cell. Or maybe he was multitasking, in which case it's flattering that he was thinking of you while eating a sloppy Pizza Pop AND playing Guitar Hero. Awww... .

He's gone on a verbal crash diet

"What you have to be alert to is whether the messages shift from interested and full to narrow and brief. This represents an emotional shift away from you," says Ellwood-Clayton.

Every text is sealed with x's and o's

"Cyber kiss marks are often meant to convey real-time wishes," says Ellwood-Clayton. However, you can't be absolutely certain that you've just virtually made out. Sometimes cultural practices can be a factor – for instance in the UK it is standard to conclude platonic texts with an "x."

"To determine the meaning of text endearments, try to spend time face-to-face with the person," advises Ellwood-Clayton.

Your phone shudders. "ILYBYFIWH" is the message.

According to The Mobile User's Guide to the New Social Etiquette by Helio, this is a text acronym (think LOL and BRB) that translates to "I like you but your friend is way hotter."

Text him a virus.