Lesson 16:Write an Argument

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Text-Speak Can Help Students

Look around at a mall or a public park, and you will likely spot at least one teenager typing into a cell phone. In recent years, text messaging has become the predominant mode of communication for the typical American teenager, and many teens say they can't live without their mobile devices. A recent survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project even found that teens send an average of sixty texts a day. Overall, 75 percent of teens text. Often when teens text, they use textspeak, such as *G2G* for "got to go." Nearly two-thirds of teens say that they add some informal style from their texting into their writing at school. Many students and teachers debate whether texting harms students' writing skills. I believe that it does not. In fact, texting can improve students' writing and language skills.

One reason that texting is not harming writing skills is that students who text are able to do what researchers call "code-switch." Students distinguish between the informal language they use for friendly conversations and more formal language used for academic writing. Studies conducted by researchers Rebecca Wheeler and Rachael Swords show that teens are sophisticated users of language. They easily switch, depending on the audience and context. They might say, "Hey, what's up?" in the lunchroom or "how r u" in text speak. But they will switch and say, "How are you, Ms. King?" to the school principal and write with formal language in their school papers.

On the other hand, a study by Penn State University points to this same frequent use of electronic messaging as precisely the problem. "Routine use of textural adaptations by current and future generations of 13- to 17-year olds may serve to create the impression that this is a normal and accepted use of the language," the study said. "[It] may rob this age group of a fundamental understanding of standard English grammar."

Responding to this dire prediction, Richard Sterling, the retired director of the National Writing Project and a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, said, "I think this is not a worrying issue at all." Professor Sterling suggested instead that the use of text-speak in schoolwork is an opportunity for teachers to teach "code-switching" and for students to think carefully about when to use informal and formal language.

Text-speak can actually help students. That is because it enhances their writing skills and makes them more agile users of language. Researchers at Coventry University in the United Kingdom asked children to write text messages that described different situations. The children who texted often had a better vocabulary. They could also express their thoughts in writing more easily than children who did not text regularly.

Dr. Beverley Plester, the lead author of the Coventry study, also believes as I do, that texting is beneficial to children. "The more exposure you have to the written word, the more literate you become, and we tend to get better at things that we do for fun," she said. Dr. Plester also observed, "The alarm in the media is based on selected anecdotes, but actually when we look for examples of text-speak in essays we don't seem to find very many."

Other studies concur. A study published in the *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* found that college students' spelling improved after they were exposed to "textisms." A study in the *Australian Journal of Educational Development and Psychology* found that the abbreviation of words in texting helps students to understand how words are built.

Kristen Hawley Turner of Fordham University has a formal name for text-speak: "digitalk." Turner and Troy Hicks of Central Michigan University contend that digitalk exhibits a complex understanding of language. They say its use improves students' language skills. Addressing educators, they write, "Discussing students' use of digitalk may serve as an opportunity to talk about audience, purpose, and appropriate uses of language in different situations."

Texting is fun and creative, and it *is* writing. This makes it worthy of educators' attention. After all, who would want to discourage students from playing with words? Textisms also have historical roots. "OK"—the most popular American word in the world—was invented during the age of the telegraph as a shortcut. Texting is certainly more playful and spontaneous than other forms of writing. Its character constraints are like the tight metrical and rhyming patterns that poets use.

Today's students are writing more than anyone before them. A Michigan State University study found that students write for their own satisfaction nearly as much as they do for school. Their writing tool of choice is often the cell phone. In addition to texting, they use it for digital writing such as e-mails, status message updates, instant messaging, and comments. They also use their cell phones for lists and even occasionally for academic writing.

All this writing is helping improve students' overall skills. As technology opens up new avenues and forms for writing—including texting—I believe we should embrace them and use them to build on the old ways for a richer future.

1

Read this sentence from the passage.

Dr. Beverley Plester, the lead author of the Coventry study, also believes as I do, that texting is beneficial to children.

Which **best** describes the author's appeal in this sentence?

- ○ A. logos, to back up the claim with data and facts
- ○ B. ethos, to show that an expert agrees with the claim
- ○ C. pathos, to stir up emotions to influence the reader
- ○ D. ad populum, suggesting that everyone agrees

2

This question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

Part A

Why did the author **most likely** write this passage?

- ○ A. to convince others that texting negatively affects students' writing skills by using biased information
- ○ B. to persuade others that texting positively affects students' writing skills by presenting a well-supported argument
- ○ C. to inform others about the two sides of the issue concerning the relationship between texting and students' writing skills
- ○ D. to entertain others with interesting stories about students' texting habits

Part B

Write **two** sentences from the passage that support your response to Part A.
Answer:

3

Reread the passage. Select **two** transition words or phrases that help clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence. Explain how these transitions connect ideas.

Answer:

4

Read this sentence from the passage.

After all, who would want to discourage students from playing with words?

How does this sentence support the author's argument?

- A. It presents a question the author hopes to research.
- B. It asks a question to inspire readers to find the answer.
- C. It states a counterclaim as a question in order to rebut it.
- D. It uses a rhetorical question to appeal to readers' emotions.

5

This question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

Part A

Which reason supports the claim that texting does **not** harm students' writing skills?

- A. The study found that texting routinely "may rob this age group of a fundamental understanding of standard English grammar."
- B. Students who text are able to distinguish between the informal language they use for friendly conversations and more formal language used for academic writing.
- C. Text-speak allows students to code switch, which improves their ability to learn a second language.
- D. A Michigan State University study found that students write for their own satisfaction nearly as much as they do for school.

Part B

Write one piece of evidence that is given in the text to support the reason or reasons you identified in Part A.

Answer:

Use both passages from this lesson to answer the question that follows.

Text-Speak Is Harming Teens' Writing Skills

Texting, or sending text messages, is having a negative effect on the writing skills of American students. The typical American teen sends about sixty texts a day, according to a survey for the Pew Internet and American Life Project. Often, when teens text, they use text-speak, such as *gr8* for "great." As you might expect, this informal use of language is seeping into teens' academic work with ill effects.

One reason texting is having a negative impact is because it affects students' overall language skills. In a study conducted by the University of Calgary,

college students were asked about what they read and whether they texted. Then, the students read a number of words, both real and made up. The study found that the students who texted more were less likely to accept or acknowledge the given words as possible real words. The opposite was true for those who read more print media, such as books and newspapers.

"The people who accepted more words did so because they were better able to interpret the meaning of the word, or tolerate the word, even if they didn't recognize the words. Students who reported texting more rejected more words instead of acknowledging them as possible words," says researcher Joan Lee.

A second reason that texting is detrimental to teens' writing skills is that it leads to declining grammar skills. Researchers at Pennsylvania State University gave middle school students a grammar test. They found that teens who frequently used language shortcuts, such as *UR2K* for "you are too kind" or *LOL* for "laugh out loud," performed poorly. Routine use of text-speak by 13- to 17-year-olds "may serve to create the impression that this is a normal and accepted use of the language," the study said. "[It] may rob this age group of a fundamental understanding of standard English grammar."

Some experts claim that texting does not have a negative effect because students are able to "code-switch." That means they separate the language they use in texting from the language they use in academic writing. However, teens in the Pew survey say that despite their best intentions, the informal language they use in texting does find its way into their school writing. Nearly two-thirds of teens say they add some informal styles from their texting into their writing at school.

Given the extent to which teens text, text-speak is probably here to stay. But, based on the reasons and evidence above, texting is detrimental to students' formal writing and language use. And, as more teens get cell phones and texting becomes even more commonplace, the problem will only get worse. Consider this remark by Andrea Lunsford, director of Stanford University's Program in Writing and Rhetoric: "When it comes to hard things, I don't think it can be worked out in 140 characters."

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Consider the claims, reasons, and evidence presented in both passages. Then, write your own argument supporting or opposing the claim that text-speak is harming students' writing skills. Include your own insights and observations, and provide supporting evidence from both sources. Be sure to address at least one opposing claim.

Answer:

Standards: ELA.8.C.1.3, ELA.8.EE.1.1, ELA.8.R.2.3, ELA.8.R.2.4, ELA.8.R.3.4