



**BEST
PRACTICES
FOR WRITING
TEXT MESSAGES**

So You Want to be a Textpert

Here's the deal: we all know that text messaging is the best way to reach students. Sound easy? It is!

Maybe you're new to texting students. Maybe you've been texting students for years and now you're ready to take it to the next level. No matter where you are in your texting journey, this ebook walks you through the steps you need to take to create or update a successful texting program.

Use the tips and tricks in the ebook to reach more students, have more engaging conversations, and see better results.

FIND YOUR VOICE · 03

CHOOSE YOUR CONTENT · 07

WRITE YOUR MESSAGES · 11

PLAN YOUR CALENDAR · 15

SAMPLE MESSAGES · 18

CONCLUSION · 22

ABOUT THIS EBOOK · 23



Find Your Voice

How you write your texts influences how your students perceive you.

The tone of a text message is just as important as your tone in an email or over the phone. Think about an annoying text you've received. WAS IT IN ALL CAPS? wuz it all lowercase w 2 many abbrevs?

Work with your team to come up with a friendly and consistent tone that balances casual with professional.



PERSONALITY

Some institutions choose to send texts that are casual, fun, and loaded with emojis and GIFs. Others opt for a more formal tone to maintain boundaries between students and staff. Both options have pros and cons, and both are equally valid.

The important thing is to make sure your texting team is on the same page about the personality of your text messages. Don't give students whiplash by sending them an easygoing text one day and a stern reminder the next.

One thing to keep in mind: no matter the tone, students are more likely to respond to text messages that feel personal.

A fun and easy way to make texts more personal is to add emojis. Researchers have found that **using smiley faces in a text message makes the recipient like the sender more**. It also makes the recipient feel more liked by the sender. That's because **seeing smiley faces activates the same parts of the brain as seeing a real human face**.

What will your team's tone be?

“ ”

Write your answer here!

Will you use emojis, GIFs, and/or MMS in your text messages?

“ ”



ABBREVIATIONS

Don't go crazy with abbreviations. Students are less likely to respond to your texts when you use too many abbreviations - especially when you use outdated and unnecessary abbreviations like "you" to "u."

Use abbreviations to keep your message within 160 characters. You don't need to change the grammar and spelling of every word. Instead, use common abbreviations like:

btw	<i>by the way</i>
fyi	<i>for your information</i>
info	<i>information</i>
tmrw	<i>tomorrow</i>
qs, ?s	<i>questions</i>
lmk	<i>let me know</i>

Example: "Lmk if you need help!"

You can also use department- or school-specific abbreviations, such as:

fin aid	<i>financial aid</i>
app	<i>application</i>
reg	<i>register, registration</i>

What abbreviations will you use with your students?



Write your answer here!



PROACTIVE VS. REACTIVE

What's your current approach to communicating with students? Do you reach out first to nudge students, or do students reach out only when they need help? You can use either approach - or both! - in your text messaging program, but keep in mind that research supports the positive impact of proactive text message nudges on student outcomes.

Think about your approach for financial aid. Would you rather:

- Text 300 students reactively to notify them of late bills?
- Text 1,000 students proactively to encourage them to pay their bills as soon as they enroll?

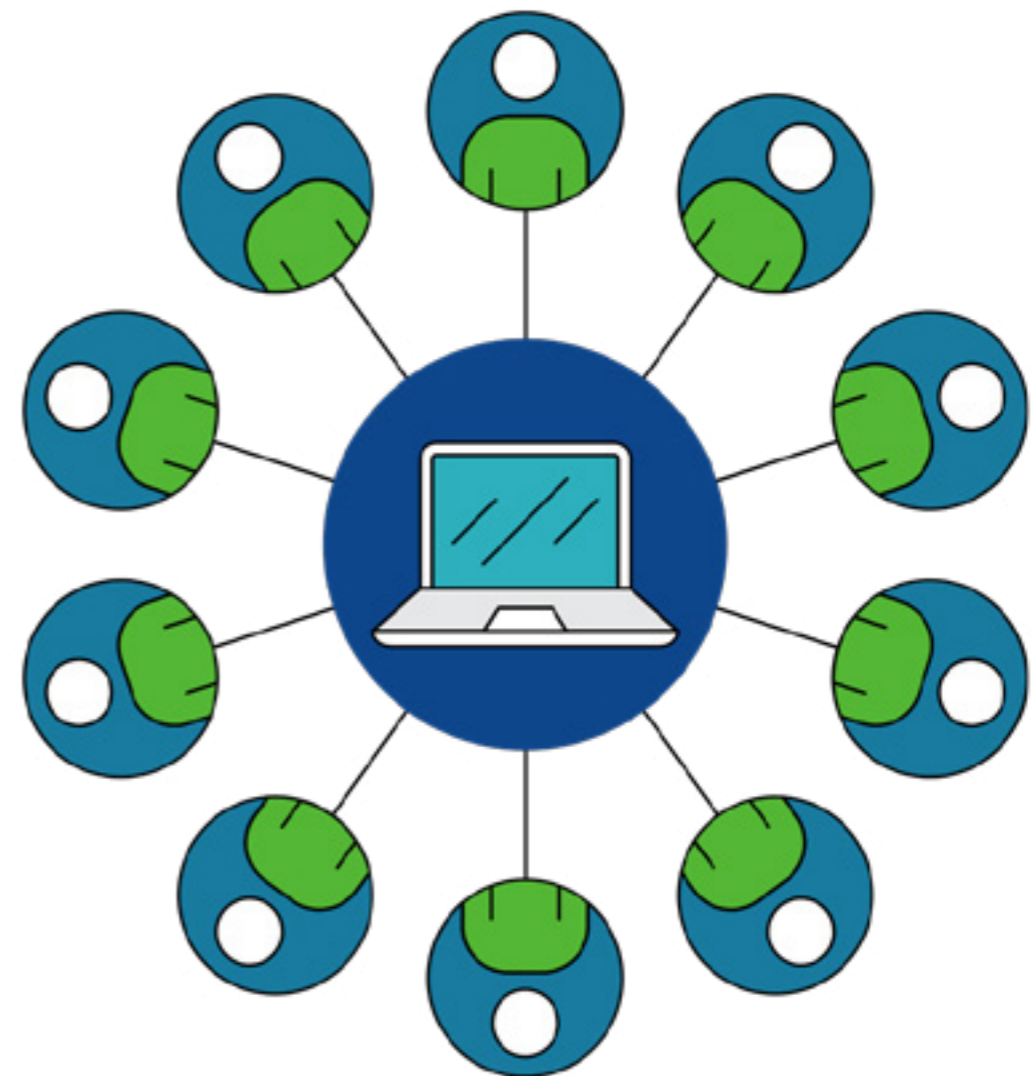
You know your students. What will help them the most?

Choose Your Content

For each text message, ask yourself: What's the goal? Who needs this message? When do they need it?

Make sure your texting program is helpful to students by setting a goal for every text message you send. Setting goals will help you write stronger text messages that get students to take action.

Most text messages to students fall into one of four categories: Introduce, Nudge, Encourage, and Inform. Your program can focus on one category or use a combination of all four.



INTRODUCE

Your first text message sets the stage for all future conversations with students, so it's important to do it right. The first message should be friendly, while also covering a few key things:

Who You Are: Start by introducing yourself and your institution.

Why You're Texting: Let students know that you'll be sending relevant, timely messages to help them.

How To Opt Out: The FCC requires you to tell students how they can opt out of getting messages from you.

Hi **Student Name**, this is **Staff Name**, your advisor at **Institution**. I'll be texting fin aid info to you this semester. Don't want texts? Text back "stop"

NUDGE

Nudges are deadline-driven messages that prompt student to take action. For some students, text nudges will remind them to complete certain tasks. For others, text nudges might inform them of tasks they didn't even know they had to complete!

Ask a question at the end of your nudges to determine how close students are to completing tasks. Students' "yes" or "no" responses might give you more insight than you'd expect.

Hi **Student Name**, your new student orientation for Signal Vine University is at 10am on 9/16! You RSVP'ed yes - can you still make it?

ENCOURAGE

Not every text needs to be chock-full of information, deadlines, and to-dos. Build your relationship with students and establish yourself as a source of support by sending occasional and informal check-in texts.

The beginning, middle, and end of the semester are perfect times to check in with students. Send them encouraging texts about starting classes or taking exams, then ask questions to gauge how they're doing. Expect more than a simple "yes" or "no" response - this is your chance to dig in deeper and engage with students.

Hi **Student Name**! It's almost the end of the school year, so I wanted to check in with you - how was your semester? Are you all set for the fall?



INFORM

Sometimes you have an exciting new resource or important information to send to students that's not tied to a deadline. That's okay! Informative text messages keep students in the loop and help them make educated choices.

Informative texts typically don't ask a question. They simply share information that's relevant to students. This is a good time to use MMS to send videos, PDFs, and other resources.

Student Name, the FAFSA made some changes this year that will affect how you're paying for school. Check out this infographic to learn more: **MMS**



Write Your Messages

The best messages are personalized, relevant, timely, and actionable.

Now that you've written some practice messages, let's take your message content to the next level.

There are four keys to writing an effective text message. For best results, make sure your messages are:

- Personalized
- Relevant
- Timely
- Actionable



PERSONALIZED

Personalized text messages have higher response rates - that's a fact! Using student information in your text messages is the most effective way to personalize each message to each student. Text message functionality similar to an email mail merge makes personalization a breeze.

Remember: you don't need to introduce yourself every time you send a text. Students will know it's you from your previous text messages. If you fall into this habit, ask yourself: would I do this when texting a friend?



Then:

A representative from Signal Vine University is coming to your school this week.

Now:

Hi **Student Name**! Make sure you stop by the Signal Vine University booth at **High School** and say hi to **Staff Name**. She'll be there all day if you have Qs.



RELEVANT

Not every student needs every message. Students will tune out your messages if they don't care about the content. The most engaging text messages are those that are relevant to a student's specific needs. Use student information to target relevant students with relevant content.

TIMELY

There are two sides to timing: the time of day your message is sent, and the timing of your message relative to the task, deadline, or event you're texting about. Learn more about timing in the section, "Plan Your Calendar." In the meantime, don't forget to add relevant times and dates to your texts.

Then:

Course registration begins this week for most students.

Then:

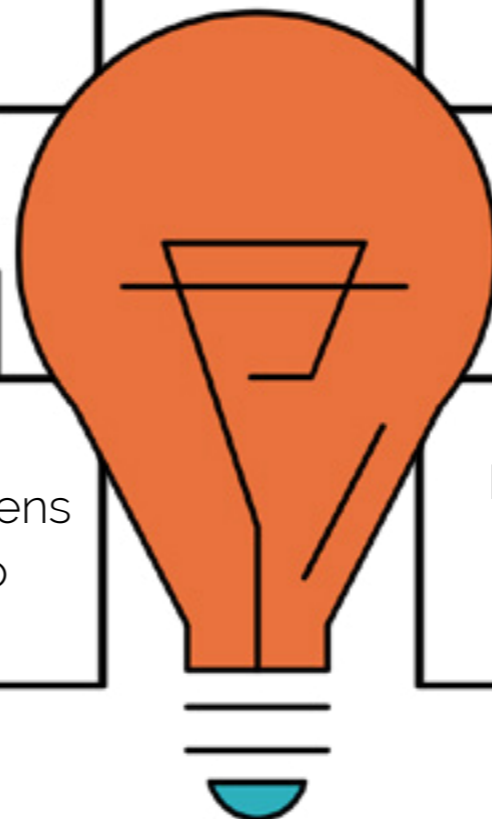
Hi **Student Name!** Orientation is coming up. Will you be there?

Now:

Student Name, fall reg for **sophomore Business** majors opens tmrw at 9am. Here's the link to register:

Now:

Hi **Student Name!** New student orientation is on 7/15 starting at 10am. Will you be there?



ACTIONABLE

Your goal for many of your text messages is to get students to take action. Add a clear call-to-action (CTA) to your text message to let students know how and where to take action. Successful CTAs could be links to online resources, instructions for filling out an application, or simply asking students to text you back.

Tip: When you send a link, use a link shortener like bit.ly or TinyURL to shrink your link. This leaves more room in your text message for other information.



Then:

Student Name, don't forget to file your FAFSA.

Now:

Student Name, FAFSA is due soon. Don't forget to file by 6/30. Access it here: **link** & text back if you have Qs!

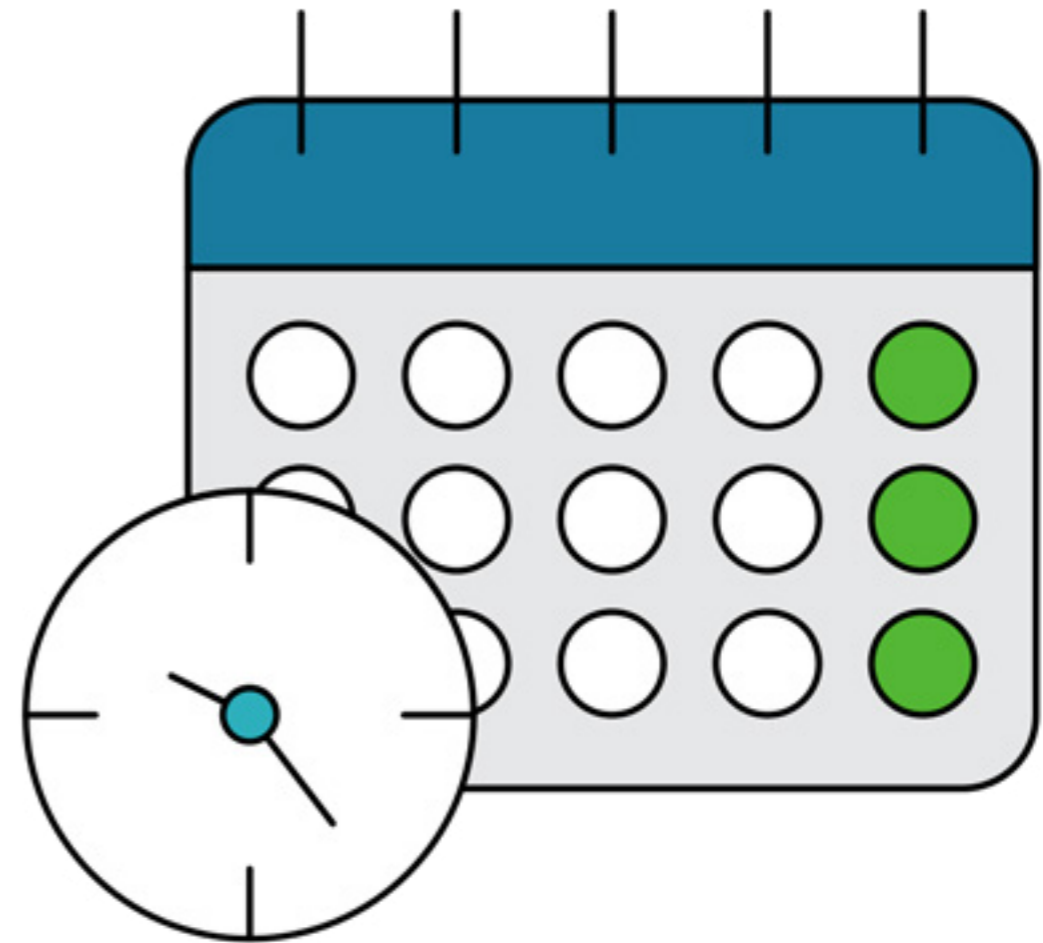


Plan Your Calendar

Plan ahead to save staff time.

You've assembled your team, set your goals, and written your text messages. Next up: it's time to schedule your messages.

Scheduling messages in advance keeps you on track, ensures that students get timely information, and saves you time down the road.



QUICK TIPS FOR SCHEDULING MESSAGES

Send text message nudges three to five days before a deadline

- Sending it any later can overwhelm students
- Sending it any earlier can cause students to forget

Schedule messages when students are most likely to respond

- High schoolers respond faster before (7am) and after school (4-7pm)
- College students respond faster after 10am, especially around lunch

Try not to schedule more than three to five text messages each month

- Texting students too often will cause them to opt out
- However, send as many texts as needed when students ask for help



TEXTING TIME SAVERS

Adding texting to your communications strategy shouldn't take up a huge chunk of your day. Use these Signal Vine tips and features to save time while texting.

Create a Bank of FAQs

Quickly copy and paste answers to students, with the added benefit of creating consistency across your texting team.

Set a Calendar Reminder

Students typically respond to messages within 15 minutes. Staff can block 30 minutes to an hour to manage responses.

Get Notifications

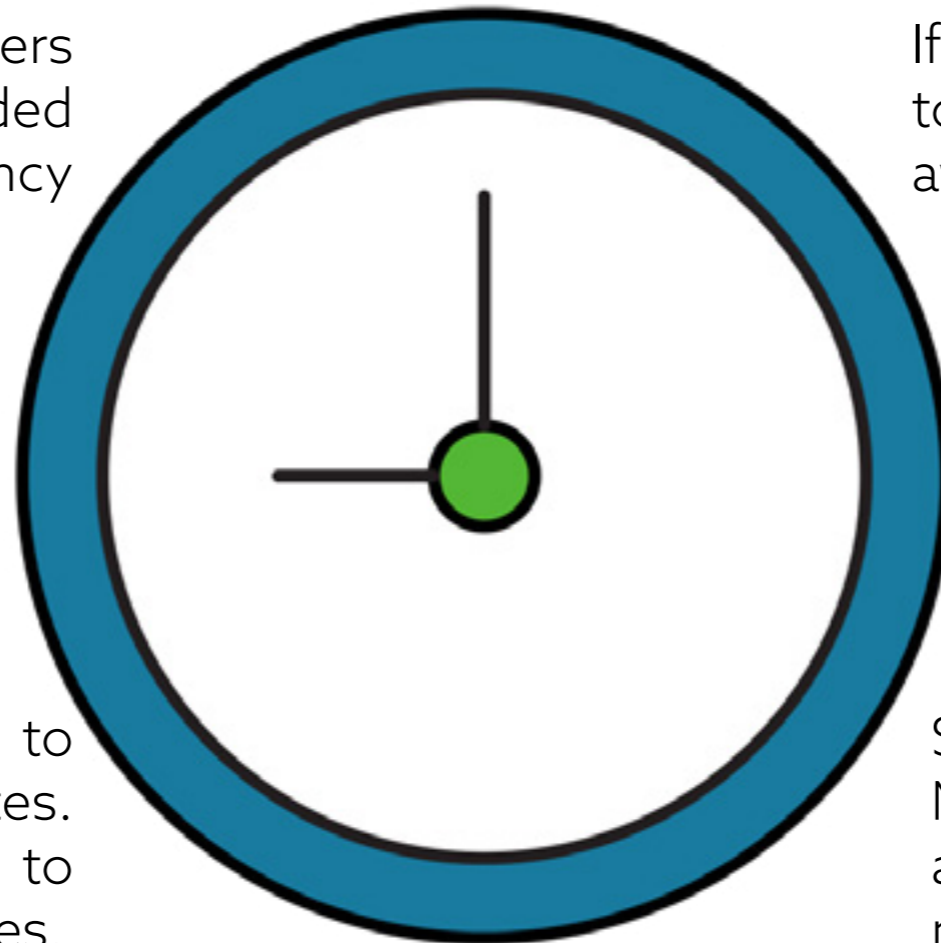
Don't waste time checking an empty inbox. Instead, turn on notifications to get a daily email or a text alerting you to unread text messages.

Turn on the Auto Responder

If you know you won't be able to answer text messages right away, set up an automated away message.

Use Response Management

Signal Vine's built-in Response Management feature quickly and automatically answers text messages for you based on how students respond to your previous message.





Sample Text Messages By Use Case

ADMISSIONS

INTRODUCE

Hi Erin, this is Jessica from SV University. I'll be texting you next steps for your application. Reply back if you have any questions.

NUDGE

Brendan, don't forget your Signal Vine University orientation is this Thursday. Check-in is at 9:30 AM. Can you still make it?

ENCOURAGE

Hi Mia! We're thinking of you as May 1 approaches. Anything we can do to help you decide about Signal Vine University?

INFORM

Hi Mark, now is a great time to visit campus. Check out your visiting options at **link**.

ADVISING

INTRODUCE

Katelyn, this is David, your Signal Vine University advisor. You can text this number if you ever have any questions.

NUDGE

Frank, it's Alicia. Let's set up a time to talk about your current semester and plan for the future. When are you free?

ENCOURAGE

Hi Faith! Good luck with your exams - you've done a great job this semester! Let me know if you need any help planning for the fall.

INFORM

Hi Amy! Quick reminder about resources at SVU to help with classes this semester, including tutoring: **link**



FINANCIAL AID

INTRODUCE

Hi Julia, this is Caroline from SVU Financial Aid. I'm here to help you pay for college.

NUDGE

Eliza, you haven't renewed your FAFSA yet, but good news - it's not too late. Renew it by 6/30 at **link**

ENCOURAGE

Mary, I know financial aid can be confusing! What questions or concerns do you have right now about paying for college?

INFORM

Questions about renewing FAFSA? That's normal! Check out this infographic and text me if you have any questions.

STUDENT AFFAIRS

INTRODUCE

Welcome to Signal Vine U! This is Hannah from Student Affairs. I'm here to share info about campus events and answer any q's you might have.

NUDGE

Have you heard about the holiday party at 8pm tomorrow in the Student Life Center? Great food and fun! Can you make it? **Attach PDF flyer**

ENCOURAGE

Hey Alexa - first semester done! Have a great break & lmk if I can do anything to get next semester off to a good start. See you back January 10th!

INFORM

Hey Rebecca, check out this month's newsletter for info about student jobs, homecoming events, and getting a sports pass: **link**



COLLEGE ACCESS

INTRODUCE

Hi Craig, this is Nancy from SV Goes to College. I'll be texting you w/ important information and reminders for college, so save this number to your phone!

NUDGE

Hey Justin! Your college needs your final transcript from high school. Have you sent that? Reply yes/no

ENCOURAGE

Hi Megan! Taking an AP test? Good luck! Also, good luck to you on your finals! You're going to do great!

INFORM

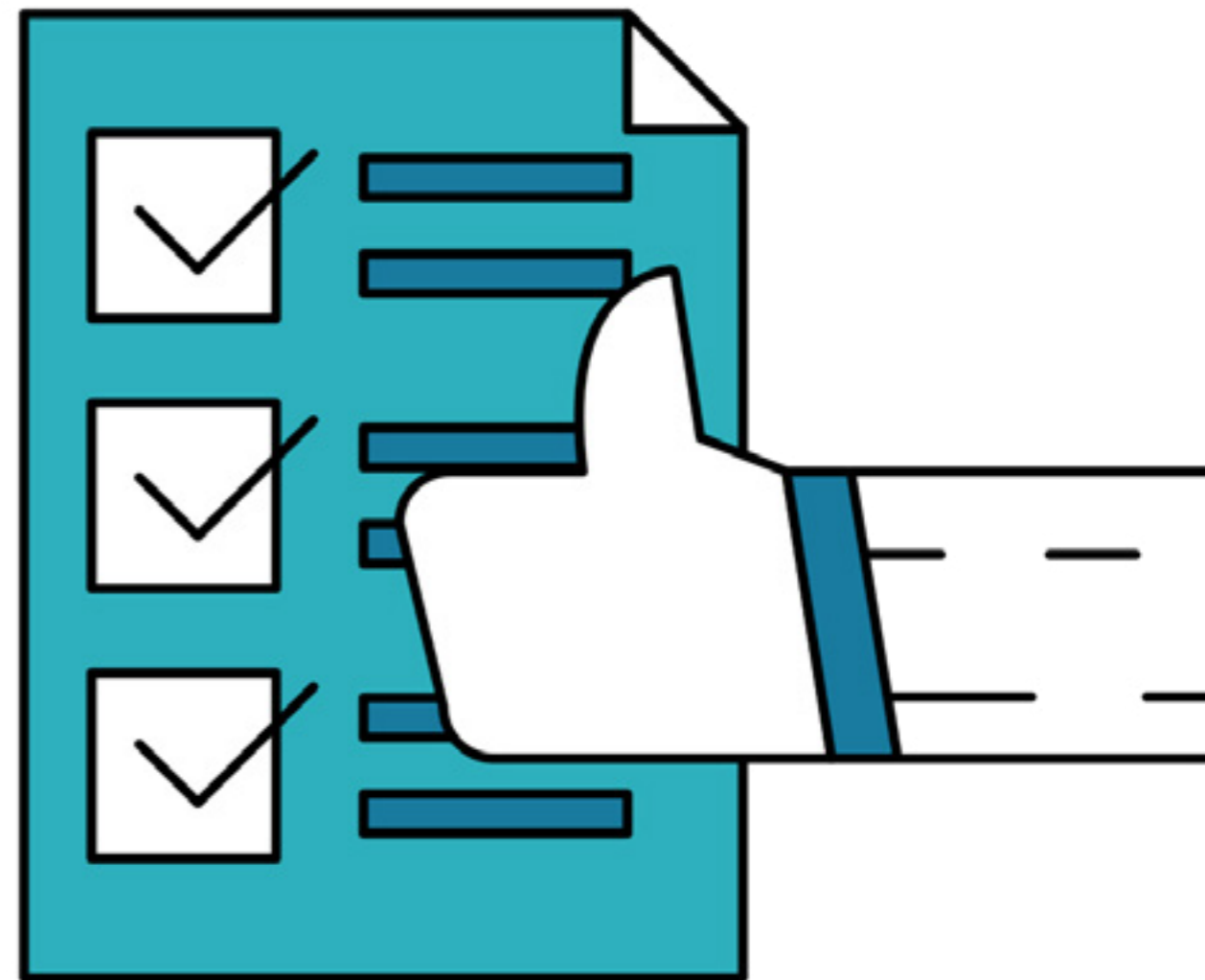
Laura, have you considered work-study? Many students do work-study to help cover the cost of tuition. Reply and we'll send more info.



Conclusion

Congratulations! You're now well on your way to becoming a textpert.

Keep practicing, writing messages, and doing A/B tests to develop your own best practices. Your students might surprise you.



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ABOUT SIGNAL VINE

MESSAGE INTELLIGENTLY.

Signal Vine's enterprise text messaging platform transforms the way you reach and engage students. Nearly 100% of students and families have access to text messaging, making it the most powerful way to communicate with any student at any time. Simple, secure, and easy to scale, Signal Vine's platform quickly delivers high-impact results.

Learn more by visiting www.signalvine.com

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