CHAPTER NINE

Messaging and texting

Introduction

"When is package coming?" "Hi do you need me to snowblow driveway?" "Could you come to my room?" "We are watching duck dynasty." These are typical short messages from my son, sometimes sent from school or work, sometimes sent from a neighboring room. He expects a quick response.

We use a few terms for these short exchanges. "Texting", "text messaging", "messaging" are in common use, old abbreviations like "SMS" and "MMS" are fading away. Since these exchanges now include images and sound as well as text I'll use the term "messaging" for short interactive communications and "texting" or "text messaging" when the focus is on text alone.

Messaging is how we do most of our personal communications now. Email and phone calls are still used for business and formal communications, but personal emails are unusual from anyone under 40. Unexpected personal phone calls are rare — and even alarming! A message, rather than a phone call or an email, is now used for most unscheduled communications.

Messaging can have unique advantages for different Explorers. Explorers who prefer not to read or write can send audio messages with some messaging apps, such as the iPhones's Messages.app.

I've learned that for one Explorer Messaging is a good way to discuss sensitive topics; he will often do better messaging from the dining room than in a face-to-face conversation. When he's messaging he can take his time to read, reread, and process, and the act of composing a reply seems to get him past an emotional and reactive response.

Messaging is accessible

One great advantage of Messaging is that cognitive accessibility is built-in. It wasn't made for our Explorers, it's a happy side-effect of typing on an error-prone screen. Whatever the reason, we'll take it!

Once upon a time, when phones weren't smart, text messaging was tedious and difficult. Letters and numbers were entered on a numeric keypad using cryptic abbreviations. The required motor skills and custom vocabulary made texting particularly challenging for Explorers.

Smartphones, and particularly the first iPhone, changed all that. The "soft" keyboard uses sophisticated software to turn errant taps into readable words, often guessing and completing meaning. An Explorer who has great difficulty printing words on paper can produce understandable text messages thanks to this predictive intelligence. It's a small sign of the kind of intelligent assistant that future Explorers may use.

Explorers who can speak but not write may be able to send text messages using speech-to-text conversion on Android or iPhone, or on iPhone by sending a spoken sound message. In practice sending a short sound message is easier and simpler than using speech to text features.

Messaging is changing quickly

The messaging Guides and Explorers care about most is sending short amounts of text and perhaps some images or voice recordings. That's basic texting, it's simple and reliable. It's what most people use every day.

It would be nice if our smartphone applications stayed with this, but at the time of writing Messaging is "hot". The Big Three, Google, Facebook, and Apple are all adding new features to Messaging. They want to attract more users to their platforms and they think Messaging is the key.

So Messaging is changing quickly. More quickly than most of the topics in this book. Most of this material should apply not matter what changes, but please don't be surprised if your Messaging apps behaves a bit differently from what's described here.

Messaging: Apple, Google and Facebook

Until fairy recently most messaging was done using text alone. Text messages were sent between mobile phones using a 1990s technology called "Short Message Service" or "SMS". Messaging has become more complex recently, with competing solutions from Apple (Messages.app), Facebook (Messenger.app), Google (Messaging.app) and others. These three products have awfully similar names, but they don't talk to each other very well.

Facebook Messenger.app works well on both Android and iPhone, but it can't do SMS texting (old style messaging). Android's Messaging.app *only* does SMS style messaging[1]. Apple's Messages.app handles old-school SMS but also Apple-only iMessages. Yes, it's a mess.

A long promised replacement for SMS called RCS (Rich Communications

Service) may help sometime in 2018 but for now the best option is to "keep calm and carry on". Apple's Messages.app does a fair job of hiding the SMS versus iMessage complexity, and Google's Messaging.app is limited but reliable.

I recommend that that a Guide and Explorer start out with the standard Messaging application for their Apple or Google smartphone. For an Apple iPhone this is "Messages.app", for an Android smartphone it's "Messaging.app". Both of these applications send and receive world-standard "SMS" text messages and images. Apple's Messages.app has some additional features that I'll discuss in the "Apple Way" section, but the basics of teaching and using text messaging apply to both Android and Apple.

In time an Explorer may do better with Facebook Messenger than either Google or Apple's solution. As I'll review below, Facebook Messenger is much easier to monitor and it's less vulnerable to the security risks of old-school SMS messaging.

Messaging: risks, monitoring, and restrictions

Text messages have some of the same risks as email. Old-school SMS (and MMS) text messages are particularly troublesome. It's easy for a bad guy to fake the phone number that's displayed with an SMS message. These fake messages are often spam, but they can also be used to spread malware (particularly on Android devices) or to trick Explorers into divulging passwords or personal information or worse. SMS messages are controlled by mobile carriers, and they have done very little to manage these risks. In addition to receiving malign SMS messages, Explorers may be at risk for sending inappropriate text messages.

Unfortunately it's difficult for a Guide to monitor these old-school SMS messages. There are a few ways to try, but none of them work very well with large volumes of messages. Some mobile carriers will provide message information for about $70 a year, but the amount of information varies. That's the only option for iPhone Explorers, Apple's tight security blocks any monitoring of SMS messages. Android Explorers have another option, their texts can be monitored with third party apps like MMGuardian (see Safety and Monitoring).

If SMS messaging is a problem then the best option is to block it entirely. An Explorer can still do messaging using Facebook (Android or iPhone) or iMessage (iPhone only). In the US Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon will all disable SMS messaging for free[2]. AT&T doesn't do free SMS blocking; this may be a reason to choose a different carrier.

Facebook messaging has two special advantages for vulnerable users. Facebook is believed to scan selected conversations for signs of predation[3]. A Guide can also use a web browser and an Explorer's credentials to view an Explorer's Facebook Messenger conversations — as long as the Explorer does not delete them (see below).

Learning messaging

Messaging isn't hard to teach; smartphones are good at bringing messages to a user's attention. Some Explorers may disable phone volume and notifications. In my own family this has required reminders that a smartphone is not just for fun.

The first step is practicing how to respond to an incoming message. Once an Explorer is good at opening a message and responding they can start initiating messages. Most Explorers, like most Messages.app users, will send a new message by tapping on an existing message collection rather than by browsing contacts or typing in a name. It's best to avoid "chat" type messages that involve several people, those can be confusing and an Explorer may reuse a "chat" collection when they really want to send a message to one person.

"Chat" collections, made up of messages between multiple people are hard to avoid. Sooner or later an Explorer will run into them. It's good to practice using them but also teach an Explorer to delete the collection of chat messages so they don't get accidentally reused.

Ongoing practice of messaging isn't hard. Guides usually have frequent reasons to contact an Explorer almost all of which are opportunities to practice message. Most smartphone users prefer messages to unscheduled phone calls, Explorers are no different. When a phone call is needed it's easy to first send a message asking if it's a convenient time for a call. Wait a minute or two to see if the Explorer will send a one word reply.
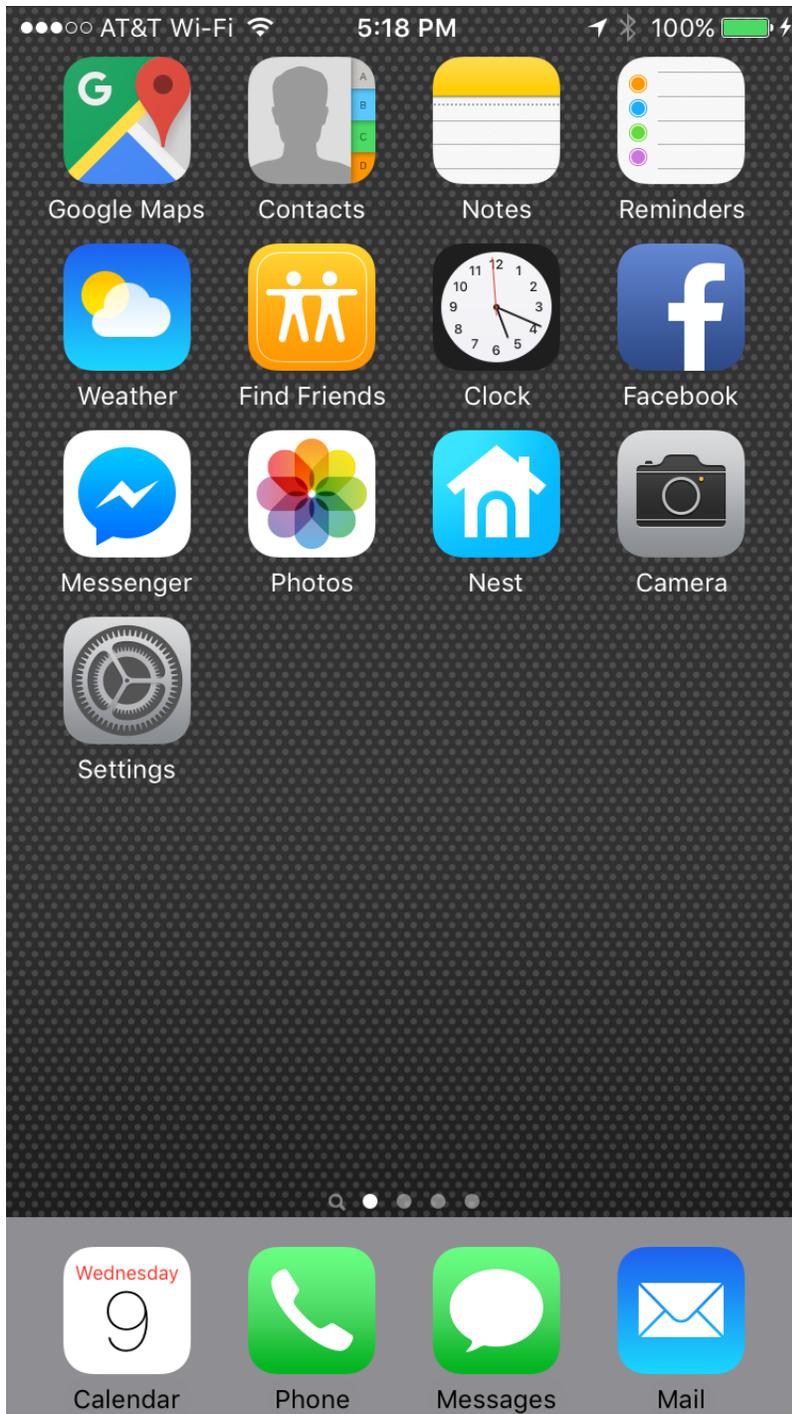
A Guide may want to experiment with using text messaging for discussing complex or difficult topics. Some Explorers will do better texting than they would do in a face-to-face setting.

Messaging: The Apple Way

Apple messaging is set up as part of configuring a new phone. When a Messages.app message is sent between two iPhones it goes through Apple's network and it's called an "iMessage". When a message is sent between iPhone and an Android phone it is an "SMS" message that uses the mobile carrier network. Apple's User Guide has a good discussion of Messages.app setup and use.

Apple's integration of modern and old style messaging is pretty powerful - when it works. It works best with the major mobile carries like AT&T and Verizon and it also works best when Contacts.app addresses aren't split between email and phone number. In Contacts.app each person should have only one entry.

For best results the Messages.app should be on the bottom bar of the iPhone screen as below:

When the Messages.app icon is on the bottom row it is always easy to use and see, and unread messages show as red icons. After the home screen is setup a Guide should review settings related to Messages.app. There are 3 to 4 places to look - Sounds, Notifications, Messages, and, optionally, Accessibility (see Apple's User Guide).

Some Explorers will have strong preferences about Sounds and Vibration. Fortunately there are many options. Vibration can be on or off in both Ring and

Silent mode. In addition "Text Tone" settings allow various Vibration settings and use of either "alert" tones or "ringtones". There's a link to "Store" for purchasing fun ringtones.[4]

In the Sounds settings there's an option to change ringers and alerts with buttons. I like to turn this off because it's too easy to accidentally press a button and turn off phone volume. It's often better to adjust volume using the menu that appears when a user sweeps their finger up from the bottom of the screen.

There's an extra message option that most people don't know about. An iPhone can be made to flash whenever it needs to get a user's attention including when messages are received. This works even when volume is turned off and some Explorers may prefer it to sound or vibration alerts. This feature is designed for users with hearing problems. It can be enabled with the Accessibility settings under Hearing, "LED Flash for Alerts".

In the Messages Settings check that the following are enabled: iMessage, Show Contact Photos, Send Read Receipts, and Send as SMS.

Lastly, in Notifications for Messages confirm that all Notifications are enabled (the sound can be changed here as well).

Messaging: The Google Way

Messaging is not the strongest feature of Android phones. Google knows this and they're changing their solutions, but until things settle down I recommend keeping it simple. On the bright side simple is also effective and reliable.

Android phones can switch their Messaging apps between different products, including at least 5 made by Google. This means different Android phones may ship with different applications for sending and receiving text messages, using "SMS" and/or "MMS". (The distinction between SMS and MMS doesn't matter any more, but the terms are still used.)

I recommend starting with the app that is described in the user guide for your phone. Depending on your phone this may be an app called "Messaging" from Google. If this app isn't satisfactory the next option is an app called "Messenger" from Google. If Messenger.app is not on your phone may need to install it from the Google Play store. See Learning the basics: User guides for iPhone and Android for help on Google Play. You may find several apps called "Messenger" on the Google Play store, including one from Facebook that I describe below. You want the "Messenger" that's made by Google Inc. If you launch a new texting app your Android phone may ask if you want it to handle SMS messages. You do want this, you can also do this using the settings in the new texting app.

Both of these Google products, Messenger.app and Messaging.app are fairly

simple to setup. A Guide and Explorer should use application Settings to choose a Notification sound and a Vibration setting (on or off usually).

Messaging: The Facebook Way

These days it seems every tech company has at least one app for sending messages from one person to another person or to a group of people. Fortunately we can ignore almost all of these. If an Explorer is using an iPhone they will use Apple's "Messages.app" and if they are using an Android phone they will use something like Google's "Messaging.app" or "Messenger.app". These Apple and Google apps can talk to one another.[5]

There is one other app to consider under special circumstances. Facebook is best known for its social network, but it also makes a messaging app for Android and iPhone called Facebook Messenger. It's available on Apple's App Store and Google's Play Store. Facebook Messenger works the same way on both platforms. Facebook Messenger can only exchange messages between Messenger use — but there are a lot of users.

Why would a Guide and Explorer consider using Facebook Messenger? There are a couple of reasons to consider it. One reason is that Facebook Messenger is easier for a Guide to monitor than either Apple Messages.app or Google's products. The other is that if an Explorer is using Facebook social then they will likely want to also use Facebook Messenger in addition to the Apple and Google products.

To use Facebook Messenger both a Guide and Explorer will need Facebook accounts. It's best for a Guide to setup full Facebook accounts using a web browser, even if the Explorer isn't going to use Facebook.app on their smartphone (See Facebook.)

Facebook Messenger is easy to use. It works like the other messaging apps we've discussed, but it also has voice and video messaging features. It can be used to do video conferencing between an iPhone and Android phone for example.

Facebook voice and video calls can't be monitored, but the more common text messages can be. If a Guide follows the recommendations I give for Facebook configuration they can use a web browser to login as the Explorer and view messages using the address www.messenger.com. This isn't a perfect solution, as an Explorer may delete messages, but it can be an efficient way to monitor for problems if and when that may be needed.

Facebook Messenger.app and Facebook.app go together, but it's possible for an Explorer to use Facebook Messenger.app without every using Facebook the social network. On the other hand, if an Explorer uses Facebook.app they'll probably need to use Messenger.app. I discuss Facebook the social network in the Facebook chapter.

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[1] Yes, it does MMS as well, but I'm trying not to make this even more complicated. MMS is almost as old as SMS and acts much the same way.

[2] http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/disable-text-messages-cell-phones-37980.html

[3] http://www.cnet.com/news/facebook-scans-chats-and-posts-for-criminal-activity/

[4] This link may go away in future, it's odd that it shows up in Settings.

[5] They talk to each other using SMS messages.