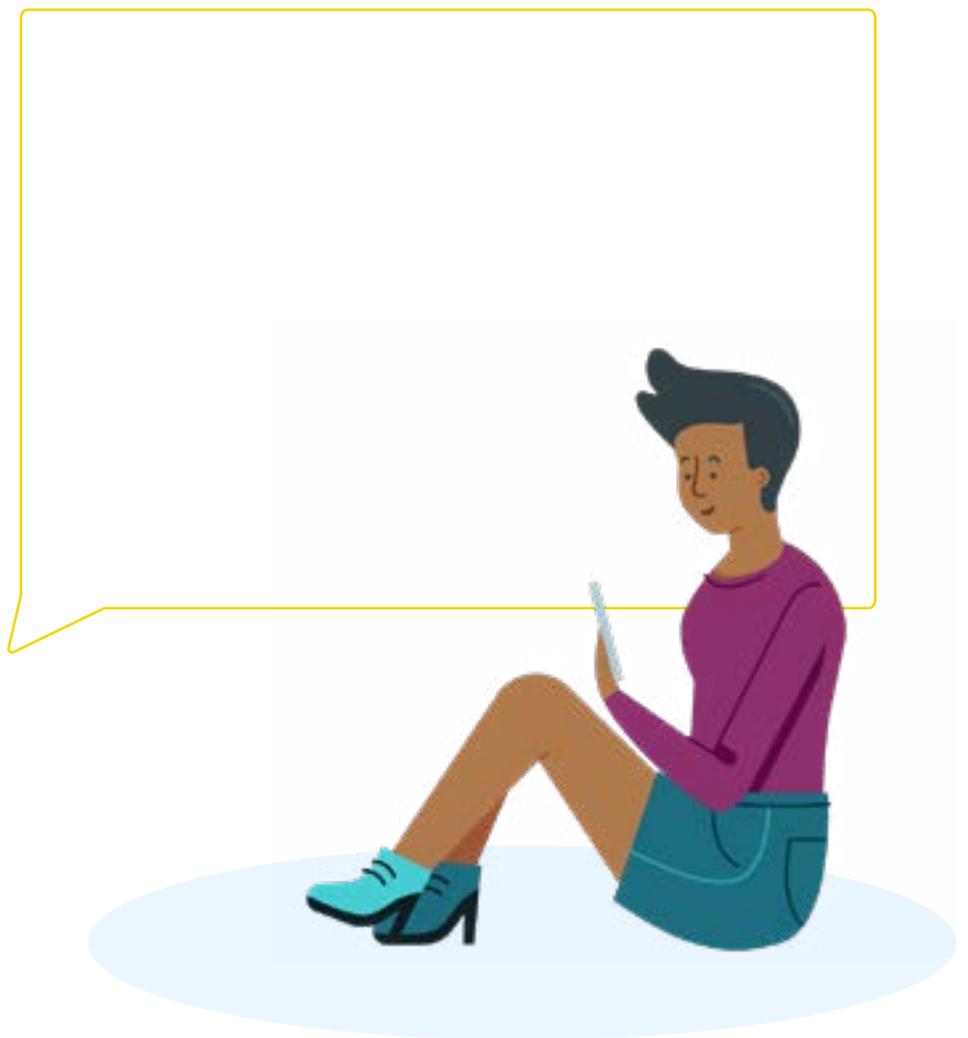

How to Text Students:

A Guide for Effective, Engaging Text Messaging Campaigns



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Why text students?

The vast majority of today's college students belong to Generation Z. This tech-loving cohort has never known a time without the internet – and barely spends any time away from their smartphones. Why use text messaging to connect with Gen Z students?

97%

read every text message they receive

90%

of texts are read within 3 minutes

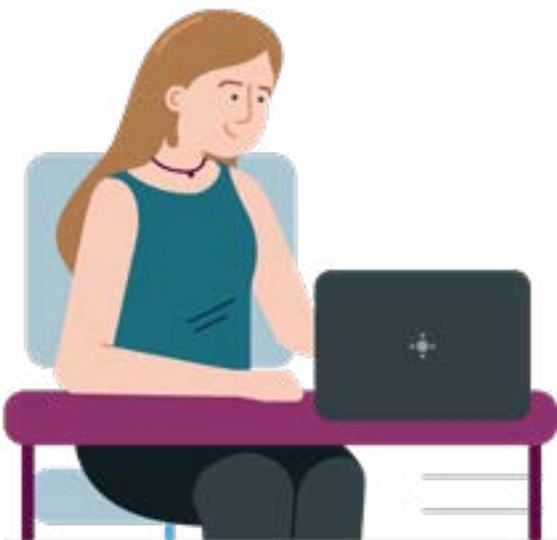
83%

want to be texted by organizations they engage with

In comparison, only 58% of Gen Z report checking their email more than once a day – and they're not reading every email they receive. Overall, open rates for email tend to hover just under 20%.

Texting is clearly the superior method to reach this student population – but, like all communication channels, it must be used strategically in order to be effective. In this guide, you'll find proven best practices for engaging students via effective text messaging campaigns.

Whether you've never texted students before, just started texting students, or have an existing text messaging program that you're looking to improve, this guide is for you.



Meet the student communication experts

This guide is brought to you by the experts at AdmitHub. Our team is made up of dedicated educators, student interns, and software engineers, all brought together by their shared passion for helping students succeed in college and beyond. Using cutting-edge artificial intelligence and industry expertise, we have partnered with more than **65 institutions** across the country to create and implement text-messaging chatbots that support students through admissions, enrollment, and all the way to graduation.

How do we know that the best practices in this guide work? Because we've used them to successfully reach more than **one million students** – helping our partners to slash summer melt, boost enrollment, strengthen retention, and so much more.

What is a text messaging campaign?

In this guide, a text messaging campaign refers to a text or a group of texts focused on a single topic, generally sent within a relatively short time frame – almost always on the same day, and often within the span of a few minutes. Examples of text messaging campaigns include:

- A single text on a topic
- A series of texts on the same topic
- A single survey question and follow-up response
An interactive, multi-question survey, with different follow-up questions or responses based on student answers (this is called “branching”)



This may be different from how you think of email or calling campaigns, which can be done over a period of days, weeks, or even months. Think of text message campaigns as their speedier, more real-time (and more powerful) cousin.

Note: This guide specifically focuses on text messaging campaigns sent via chatbots, which allow for two-way communication between students and the bot. One-way text messaging campaigns are possible, but do not deliver the same results as chatbots.

How can colleges and universities use text messaging campaigns?

When implemented with best practices, text messaging campaigns can have an enormous impact on the student experience – and on student behavior. Schools can use text messaging campaigns to do everything from reminding students of upcoming deadlines to helping influence if (and where) they decide to enroll.

Bonus benefit: Students aren't the only ones who benefit from text messaging campaigns. By proactively addressing common student concerns, campaigns reduce the burden of having to repeatedly email or call students with repetitive answers to FAQs or reminders for transactional tasks. **Text messaging campaigns can free up valuable staff time – which they can then spend building stronger relationships with students.** In addition, the insights gathered through text messaging campaigns can help alert staff to students who need more intensive support or to gaps in existing support structures, allowing the team to focus on areas where they can have the greatest impact.

In general, each text messaging campaign can help you achieve one of four common goals (see page 5).

What results can be achieved with text messaging campaigns?

Colleges and universities across the country have used text messaging campaigns to help increase student engagement – and the results have been incredible: record-breaking enrollment, drastic decreases in summer melt, high levels of student satisfaction, and more.

Different types of campaigns will help you achieve different results. The three most common types are nudges and reminders, interactive surveys, and fun and cultural messages. Remember that one type of campaign isn't necessarily "better" than another – and the best for maximizing student engagement is most often a mix of all three campaign types.



Text Messaging Campaigns: 4 Key Objectives



Collect information about students

What are your students interested in? Where could they use help? Are they planning to apply to your school? How likely are they to enroll? Surveying students via text is a quick and effective way to check in on your students and learn more about them. Data from surveys can be used to improve support services, refine future campaigns, and ensure student needs are being met.



Move students to action

Have a deadline fast approaching? Remind students of the upcoming task and due date – along with the steps they need to take – with a proactive text messaging campaign. From completing the FAFSA to meeting with their advisor, students appreciate targeted reminders that keep them on track. Campaigns can help increase on-time completion rates for a variety of tasks.



Personalize student experiences

Research has shown that a sense of belonging can help students be more successful in their college careers. Targeted text messaging campaigns based on existing data can provide students with more individual support from your school. Sharing out fun facts and trivia can also help students feel like they're part of the campus culture and inspire them to participate in more events and activities.



Increase student agency

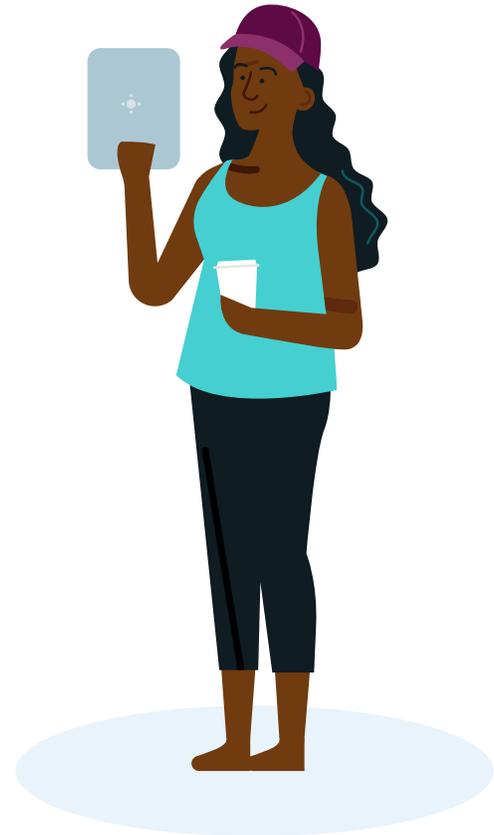
Campaigns remind students of the helpful resource they can rely on at any time of the day or night: your school's chatbot. Chatbots that use artificial intelligence, like the ones developed by AdmitHub, can answer student questions 24/7, empowering students to solve issues on their own. Students can feel more self-sufficient and confident as they navigate college life.

Spur Students to Action with Nudges & Reminders

Nudges and reminders are proactive messages sent to students to alert them to upcoming deadlines or activities, or to share helpful information or resources that will help students navigate admissions, enrollment, or other school-related tasks. A nudge can be a single text or a series of texts on the same topic.

Consider sending nudges around the following topics:

- FAFSA
- Accepting loans
- Student billing
- Scholarships
- Open houses
- Admit days
- Orientation
- Transcripts
- Immunizations
- Test scores
- Enrollment form
- Housing
- Activate email
- Log into portal
- Meet with advisor
- Academic programs
- Campus resources
- Tutoring

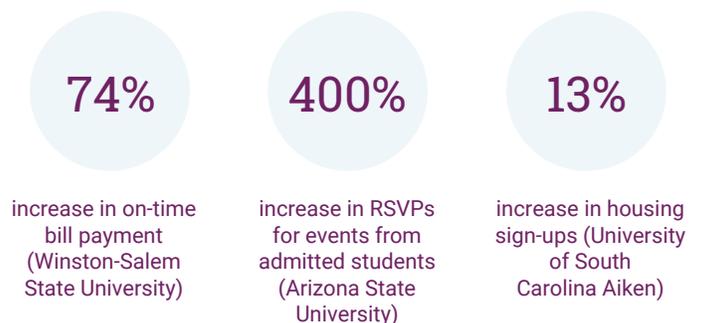


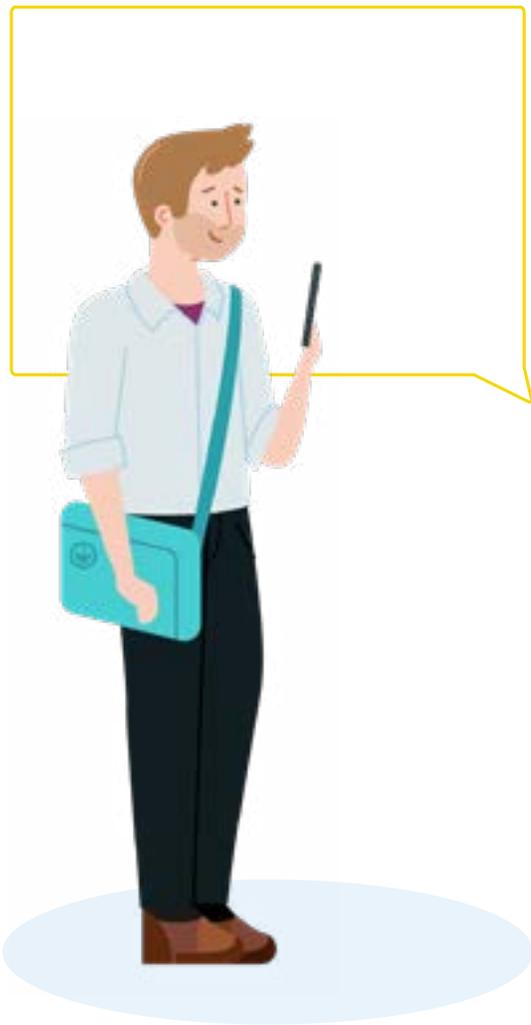
“The results are pretty staggering...This meant more students than ever were able to enjoy new student orientation, and figure out the next phase in life without the weight of unfinished business hanging over their heads.”

Joel Lee, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management at Winston-Salem State University

In addition to prompting students to take specific actions, nudges also remind students that they can ask the school’s chatbot about other questions they may have. Many schools see an uptick in questions to their bots within 24 hours after sending a campaign – and most of those questions tend to be unrelated to the campaign’s topic.

With text messaging nudge campaigns, schools have seen results such as:





Boost Student Engagement with Interactive Surveys

Surveys are interactive text messaging campaigns that pose a question (or multiple questions) to students in order to gather their responses. Surveys can be “fixed,” where all students see the same questions, or “branching,” where a student’s response determines the next question they see.

Surveys can also be combined with nudges – for example, a question asking if a student has started their FAFSA, where a “yes” triggers a nudge with directions on how to finish and submit their FAFSA and a “no” triggers a nudge with instructions for finding the proper forms. The results of these surveys can be downloaded as a report, which allows staff to follow up individually with a followup campaign or call.

Consider sending surveys around the following topics:

- Complete application intent
- Ask about the likelihood of enrolling
- Learn about students’ interests, preferences, and needs
- Gather feedback on events
- Collect feedback on campaigns and the chatbot experience
- Schedule calls with students
- Sense of belonging check-ins

With text messaging survey campaigns, schools have seen results such as:

74.2%

average response rate to all surveys (Valdosta State University)

51.1%

of prospective students sharing their college plans (Kent State University)

99%

positive reviews of the text messaging chatbot (Cal State Northridge)

Build Students' Sense of Community with Fun & Cultural Messages

Less about format than content, text messaging campaigns that focus on student engagement and campus culture aim to build students' sense of community and belonging on campus. These campaigns may take the form of nudges (invitations to campus events, tips for making friends, reminders to sign up for clubs, etc.) or surveys (trivia about the school, event RSVPs, etc.). Regardless of the form, these fun and cultural campaigns work to build excitement about attending your school – which can in turn increase enrollment and retention.

Consider sending fun and cultural campaigns around the following topics:

- School traditions
- School fun facts
- Trivia campaigns
- Extracurricular opportunities
- Encouragement during key times
- Holiday celebrations
- Office closures
- Mascot appearances
- Special events on campus
- On-campus resources

With fun and cultural campaigns, schools such as the University of Wyoming have seen the following results:

32%

decrease in summer melt

9%

increase in first-year enrollment, contributing to the largest class in history

42%

opt-in rate with weekly trivia series

50%

engagement with weekly trivia series

“ There isn't a better way to get timely and honest responses than doing event surveys through AdmitHub. The text message format encourages students to say exactly what's on their mind, and the downloadable report feature makes organizing and analyzing responses extremely easy.”

Ryan Hogan, Director of Admissions,
Valdosta State University



“Thank you for everything. Honestly. The updates and reminders were a good bit of help. And the personality of the texts were hilarious and brightened my day. The trivia was fun and got me excited to be part of the culture of UW. Thanks a ton.”

Member of the University of Wyoming Class of 2022

How can I ensure my text messaging campaigns are successful?

One of the best ways to ensure students engage with your campaigns is to make sure your messages embody a personality, tone, and voice that students enjoy interacting with. This personality should extend to all of your texting communications to ensure students have a consistent experience.

Based on AdmitHub’s experience with over 65 partner institutions, students are most responsive to the following three personas:

- **Fellow student:** friendly, young, authentic
- **Goofy adult:** cheesy “dad jokes” and puns, references to outdated technology and television, use of old memes
- **Friendly robot:** think Siri or Alexa: good-natured, helpful, responsive

Whichever approach you take, there are four key rules to follow.



Text Messaging Campaigns: 4 Best Practices for Writing



Keep it conversational

Messages should be friendly, casual, and emotive. Consider including emojis, gifs, or videos to liven up messages. Use the student's first name in several messages (although not every message).



Be brief

Each text should have no more than 160 characters; long messages should be broken up into multiple texts. Use links to share more in-depth information. Keep each campaign focused on a single topic and call to action.



Encourage engagement

The more students engage with your campaigns, the more successful those campaigns will be. Encourage students to ask questions, especially if you have a chatbot with artificial intelligence that can reply without needing staff assistance.



Stay on target

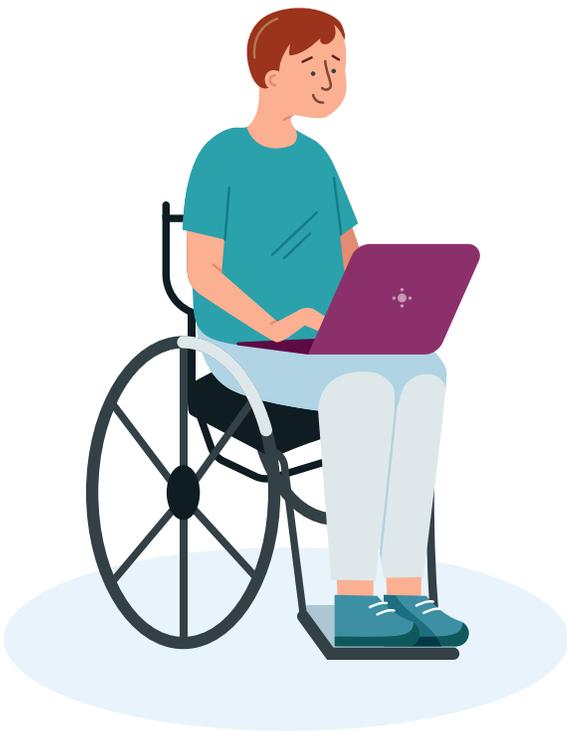
Rather than sending out blanket messages, be as specific and relevant as possible. Send FAFSA reminders only to students who have not submitted theirs. Communicate about specialized programs or resources to the groups they target for the greatest impact.

One of the best ways to ensure messages follow these best practices is to involve students or alumni in the writing process. Look for student workers, consult with resident advisors (RAs), or hire interns.

A friend and confidant for students

Students often feel an element of shame when asking questions, especially with financial issues. They may be embarrassed by monetary concerns or worried that they appear “dumb” for not knowing the next step. When chatbot communications follow the best practices outlined in this guide, students won’t feel judged.

With the right personality and messaging, students often start to view a school’s chatbot as their friend and confidant, making them more willing to approach the chatbot with “silly” questions than human staff. As a result, chatbots can do more than guide students through the tasks they need to accomplish – they can provide students with the emotional support they need to make it through the process.



How do I get started with text messaging campaigns?

Any staff member with a cell phone can start texting students, but that’s not the same as a true text messaging campaign. For effective, efficient, and measurable text messaging campaigns, schools need three key elements:

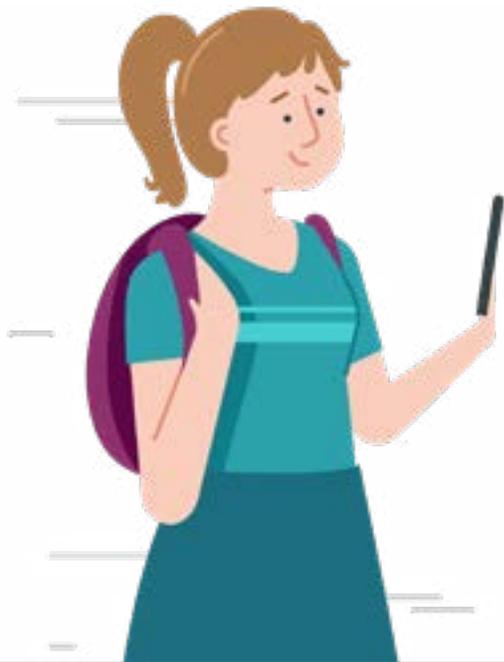
- A chatbot powered by artificial intelligence, ideally built specifically for higher education
- A text messaging manager, team, or committee to manage your school’s campaigns
- A trusted technology partner who can strategically support and guide you at every step

With artificial intelligence, a chatbot can engage in real two-way conversations with students, both actively sending out messaging to students and responding to incoming inquiries. Ideally, your chatbot should function 24/7, as many students have questions outside of typical office hours, and should be able to escalate particularly complex or sensitive topics directly to college or university staff. Look for chatbots that will continually grow and learn using artificial intelligence, as they will become more effective over time.

On the administrative side, your staff can ensure the chatbot is providing accurate answers to students and handle any escalated messages that come through. Schools can choose the model that works best for them, whether that be a single dedicated manager who plans, writes, and manages all the campaigns; a small team that collaborates, such as a manager, writer, and data expert; or a coordinator who works with a larger committee to set your chatbot strategy.

The final element is a technology partner that shares their expertise, insight, and best practices with you. For best results, look for a partner who goes beyond simply selling and implementing chatbot software – especially because the software should be simple and straightforward to use. Focus on a partner who will also provide strategic support and guidance throughout your implementation, with regular check-ins to ensure the chatbot communications strategies are aligned with your strategic goals. **In short, your partner should focus as much on your success as you do on your students' success.**

With these elements in place, you can start developing text messaging campaigns that engage and delight your student body – and deliver the results your institution is looking for.



Get started with a free consultation and demo from an AdmitHub text messaging campaign expert.

Contact us today at info@admithub.com, or visit our website at www.admithub.com