

## Texting, Tweeting, and Other Internet Abbreviations

By Judge Herbert B. Dixon Jr.

After I finished a recent presentation on the subject of social media, a colleague in attendance confidentially told me that he had no idea what we were talking about when the panel discussion turned to popular Internet abbreviations such as OMG, PITA, and WTF. I was amused, to say the least, but my colleague's candor gave me the idea for the subject of this technology column as an aid to other similarly situated colleagues.

To be sure, many of today's abbreviations were well known before the Internet became integrated in contemporary society. Most among my generational colleagues will recognize old abbreviations such as TGIF, KISS, BS, AWOL, ASAP, SWAK, VIP, and TLC, and notice other acronyms, such as CD (Certificate of Deposit to Compact Disc), that have developed an additional meaning during our lifetime.

But now, in today's Internet new media age, society's use of abbreviations is on steroids. These linguistic shortcuts are in constant use in communications sent by text, tweet, instant messaging, and other new media. How did we get to this point of excess abbreviations? Let's consider the restricted character limitations of two media formats, text messaging and Twitter.

Text messaging is the granddaddy of social media in which abbreviations are often used. Credit for the development of text messaging is given to Friedhelm Hillebrand, a communications researcher and chairman of the nonvoice services committee within the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM). The GSM is a group that sets standards for the majority of the global mobile market. In 1985, Hillebrand and others were investigating the possibility of a technology standard for cell phones to transmit and display text messages. At that time, the bandwidth constraints for car phones

were severe, requiring each message to be as short as possible. After typing blurbs of random sentences on several sheets, Hillebrand noticed that the blurbs nearly always measured out at about the same length, just under 160 characters.<sup>1</sup>

There were significant disputes within the committee whether 160 characters would be enough to communicate most thoughts. To supplement this rather unscientific experiment, two other unscientific studies finally convinced them that the 160-character limitation was sufficient, namely, that most postcards and telex messages they reviewed were about the same length, approximately 160 characters. This is how the standard was born for one of today's most popular forms of digital communication.<sup>2</sup> And why shouldn't a message of less than 160 characters be sufficient? Think about it. Other than unwanted spam e-mail and messages from long-winded acquaintances, most e-mail messages today consist of a subject line and brief text asking a question or providing information.

Twitter, another new media product, also has a character limitation for its messages (called tweets). According to one of Twitter's cofounders, Jack Dorsey, Twitter had its conceptual roots in the world of vehicle dispatch—where cars and bicycles needed to alert others where they were and what they were doing at that instant. The original name for Twitter was "Status," but it evolved to Twitter, based on its definition—a short burst of inconsequential information—and chirps from birds. Building on the foundation for standard text messages, a tweet reserves up to 20 characters for the user name, and allows up to 140 characters for the message.<sup>3</sup>

Not only do text messaging and Twitter have character limitations, so do other forms of new media, such as IM (instant messaging) and Internet chat rooms. Thus,

based on the need to get a point over quickly, there developed the need to use as few words and letters as possible to get one's point across. There is even a book, *ttyl*, based on Internet IM transcripts between three high-school girls facing a variety of emotional events in their personal and social lives. The book is written in the same way in which today's Internet slang abbreviations are actually used.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, there have been at least three sequels to the book, also written using real-life Internet abbreviations.

At the end of this column is a beginner's list of Internet abbreviations to bring my colleagues up to speed with the popular writing format. This list is not comprehensive. To see a comprehensive list, there are numerous Internet sites that maintain a running list of Internet abbreviations and slang that you can find by using your favorite Internet search engine and using the search term "Internet abbreviations." As you go through the abbreviations below, you will note that a substantial number of them are phrases many of us use daily. If you have never thought about one of your typical phrases written as an acronym or using only abbreviations, you will have a better chance of recognizing them in the future after you go through the list.

Some of the abbreviations and acronyms below use the same initials as other phrases or as contained in specialized jargon, e.g., POS (Parent Over Shoulder) could also mean Position Of Strength, Public Open Space, Proof of Shipment, Port of Seattle, Period of Service, or Physician's Order Sheet—to name a few. In compiling this list, I operated under a self-imposed restriction that you would expect in a quality magazine such as *The Judges' Journal*; that is, I chose not to list numerous slang abbreviations because they contained expletives. As there exist

in life, there are hundreds of such slang abbreviations in social media. Of the few that I list below, I use only a capitalized first letter of the expletive followed by “\*.” If at first you don’t recognize the word, use your imagination. You’ll figure it out.

Before I list the general-use glossary, I’ll start with coded abbreviations your children might use to warn the audience that their conversation is stifled because you’re nearby:

- 9—Parent is watching.
- 99—Parent is no longer watching.
- AITR—Adult in the room (or AIR).
- C9—Code 9 (meaning parents in the room).
- KPC—Keeping parents clueless.
- NP—Nosy parent, also No problem.
- PA—Parent alert (or P911).
- PAH—Parent at home (or P@H).
- PAL—Parents are listening.
- PBB—Parent behind back.
- PIR—Parent in room.
- PITR—Parent in the room.
- PLOS—Parent looking over shoulder.
- POS—Parent over shoulder, also Piece of s\*.
- POMS—Parent over my shoulder.
- PRW—Parents are watching.

Always consider the initials in the context of the message. The mere fact that your child wrote one of the above set of initials while you were looking over his shoulder is circumstantial evidence, and it may not be absolute proof he is warning his friends of your presence.

Now that you have gotten an idea how the Internet abbreviations are used, I have listed below a glossary of often-used abbreviations. To achieve the correct mindset, remember that “C” is often a substitute for “see,” “R” for “are” and “er,” “U” for “you,” and “Y” for “why,” “yes,” and sometimes “you.” Although the abbreviations below are set forth in capital letters, they most often are written in small letters in real-life messages because typing an entire sentence in capitals is considered shouting. If you would like to see a more comprehensive list of Internet abbrevia-

tions, go to your favorite search engine (Google, Bing, Yahoo Search, AltaVista, AOL Search, dogpile, Lycos—you get the point) and use the search term “Internet abbreviations.”

Finally, my gf, before u go 2 the glossary, plz tcoy uwma. mhotoy cuz now u will c msgs w afpoe. ttul.

## Beginner’s List of Internet Abbreviations

### Greetings/Salutations

- HUD—How you doing?
- HRU—How are you (also HAU)?
- R U there—Are you there?
- RUOK—Are you OK?
- Sup—What’s up?

### Relationships

- BF—Boyfriend or best friend.
- BFF—Best friend(s) forever.
- FF—Friend(s) forever.
- MF—My friend.
- RLF—Real-life friend.
- SIL—Sister-in-law.

### Mood or Reaction

- ALOL—Actually laughing out loud.
- CID—Crying in disgrace.
- CRBT—Crying real big tears.
- FOFL—Falling on floor laughing.
- FOMCL—Falling off my chair laughing.
- LTIC—Laughing ‘til I cry.
- OMG—Oh my God/goodness/gosh (expressing shock or amazement).
- ROTFL—Rolling on the floor laughing.
- ROTFLMAO—Rolling on the floor laughing my a\* off (or just use LMAO).
- SM—Senior moment.
- TNTL—Trying not to laugh.
- WTF—\*.<sup>5</sup>

### Negative Descriptions

- BS—Bull s\*.
- FOS—Full of s\*.
- PITA—Pain in the a\*.

### Affection

- AML—All my love.
- ILY—I love you.
- LOL—Lots of love, also Laughing out

loud.

LY—Love you.

XOXO—Hugs and kisses (or H&K).

### Closings

- AIMP—Always in my prayers.
- B4N—Bye for now.
- BBBG—Bye bye be good.
- BBFN—Bye bye for now (or BN4N).
- BRB—Be right back (or IBRB).
- CIAO—Goodbye (in Italian).
- CYA—See ya, or Cover your a\*.
- CYT—See you tomorrow (or CUT).
- DOEI—Goodbye (in Dutch).
- GN—Good night.
- GNSD—Good night sweet dreams.
- GTG—Got to go.
- IBRB—I’ll be right back.
- OAO—Over and out.
- SWAK—Sealed (or sent) with a kiss.
- TTFN—Ta-ta for now.
- TTUL—Talk to you later.
- XOXOZZZ—Hugs and kisses and sweet dreams.

### Disclaimers

- AFAICT—As far as I can tell.
- AFAIK—As far as I know.
- AFAIR—As far as I remember.
- AFAIU—As far as I understand.
- DQMOT—Don’t quote me on this.



**Judge Herbert B. Dixon Jr.** is the technology columnist for *The Judges’ Journal* and co-chair of *The Journal’s* Editorial Board. He sits on the Superior Court of the District of Columbia and is a former chair of the National Conference of State Trial Judges. He can be reached at [herbert.dixon@dcsc.gov](mailto:herbert.dixon@dcsc.gov).

### Timing

AOAS—All of a sudden.  
ASAP—As soon as possible.  
B4—Before.  
COB—Close of business.  
DNBL8—Do not be late.

### Other Frequent Abbreviations

Adr—Address.  
AFAP—As far as possible.  
AFJ—April Fool's joke.  
AFPOE—A fresh pair of eyes.  
AIMB—As I mentioned before.  
AISB—As I said before.  
AWOL—Absent without leave.  
B&F—Back and forth.  
BAU—Business as usual.  
B/C—Because.  
BD—Big deal.  
BION—Believe it or not (or BON).  
BTDT—Been there done that.  
BTHOOM—Beats the heck out of me.  
BTN—Better than nothing.  
BTW—By the way.  
BYOA—Bring your own Advil.  
BYOB—Bring your own bottle, or Bring your own beer.  
Bz—Busy.  
CRS—Can't remember s\*.  
C/S—Change of subject.  
CU L8R, G8TR—See you later, gator (as in See you later, alligator).  
Cuz—Because.  
CWOT—Complete waste of time.  
Cx—Canceled.  
Def—Definitely.  
DEGT—Don't even go there.  
DGT—Don't go there.  
DKDC—Don't know don't care.  
DTRT—Do the right thing.  
DUI—Driving under the influence.  
DWI—Driving while intoxicated.  
EMA—E-mail address.  
EMFBI—Excuse me for butting in.  
EML—E-mail me later.  
EMSG—E-mail message.  
EOD—End of day, also End of discussion.  
ETA—Estimated time of arrival.  
F2F—Face-to-face.  
FAQ—Frequently asked questions.  
FCOL—For crying out loud.  
FUD—Fear, uncertainty, and disinformation.

FYI—For your information.  
GAL—Get a life.  
GLBT—Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (or LBGT).  
GMTA—Great minds think alike.  
GOI—Get over it.  
GOYHH—Get off your high horse.  
Gratz—Congratulations.  
H/O—Hold on.  
H/P—Hold please.  
HAG1—Have a good one.  
I H8 It—I hate it.  
IANAC—I am not a crook.  
IABDFI—If it ain't broke, don't fix it.  
IITM—It's in the mail.  
IITYWIMWYBMAD—If I tell you what it means will you buy me a drink?  
IMAO—In my arrogant (or anal) opinion.  
IMHO—In my humble opinion.  
IYD—In your dreams.  
JM2C—Just my 2 cents.  
K—OK.  
KISS—Keep it simple stupid.  
KIT—Keep in touch.  
L8—Late.  
Meh—Who cares, whatever (expressing indifference or boredom).  
MHOTY—My hat's off to you.  
MIA—Missing in action.  
MLAS—My lips are sealed.  
Msg—Message.  
MTFBWY—May the force be with you.  
N—No.  
N/M—Nothing much.  
NADT—Not a D\* thing.  
Natch—Naturally.  
NBD—No big deal.  
NE1—Anyone.  
NE14KFC—Anyone for KFC?  
NIMBY—Not in my backyard.  
NM U—Not much, you?  
OIC—Oh, I see.  
OTH—Off the hook (great or outstanding).  
PDS—Please don't shout (stop writing in all capital letters).  
Pix—Pictures or photos.  
Pls—Please.  
Plz—Please.  
Pw—Password.  
Q—Question.  
R U—Are you?  
RBTL—Read between the lines.

RUS—Are you serious?  
RUSOS—Are you SOS (in trouble)?  
S2U—Same to you.  
SB—Stand by.  
SH—S\* happens.  
SHB—Should have been.  
Shhh—Quiet.  
Sk8er—Skater.  
SLAP—Sounds like a plan.  
SME—Send me e-mail.  
SMIM—Send me an instant message.  
Smt—Something.  
SOK—It's OK.  
Soz—Sorry.  
Str8—Straight.  
SWIM—See what I mean?  
SYL—See you later (also SUL).  
TAW—Teachers are watching.  
TCOY—Take care of yourself.  
TGIF—Thank God (or goodness) it's Friday.  
TLC—Tender loving care.  
TMI—Too much information.  
TNX—Thanks.  
TYCLO—Turn your caps lock off.  
TYVM—Thank you very much.  
U—You.  
U2—You too?  
U8—You ate?  
UNPC—un-politically correct.  
UOK—Are you OK?  
UWMA—Until we meet again.  
VIP—Very important person.  
W8—Wait.  
WAYD—What are you doing (or WAUD)?  
WAYN—Where are you now?  
WDYM—What do you mean?  
WITW—What in the world?  
WRU—Where are you?  
WTG—Way to go.  
WTMI—Way too much information.  
WUZUP—What's up?  
WYRN—What's your real name?  
WYWH—Wish you were here (or WUWH).  
YSDIW8—Why should I wait?  
YW—You're welcome.  
ZZZ—Sleeping, bored, tired. ■

### Endnotes

1. Mark Milian, *Why Text Messages Are Limited to 160 Characters*, L.A. TIMES (May 3, 2009, 1:28 PM), <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/>

2009/05/invented-text-messaging.html.

2. Hillebrand produced a comprehensive book describing the development of the GSM system: *GSM AND UMTS: THE CREATION OF GLOBAL MOBILE COMMUNICATION* (Friedhelm Hillebrand *ed.*, 2001).

3. David Sarno, *Twitter Creator Jack Dorsey Illuminates the Site's Founding Document, Part I*, L.A. TIMES (Feb. 18, 2009, 5:04 PM), <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2009/02/twitter-creator.html>.

4. LAUREN MYRACLE, *TTYL* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2004).

5. Because of the expletive within this Internet slang, the author recommends that you look up "WTF" using your Internet search engine.