Portable media such as iPods, notebook computers, and especially cell phones are elemental to students’ learning and social experiences while at Western, first year students in particular who often tend to use their phones as emblems of distinction and belonging during their adaptation to university life. This means that they are going to be in the classroom! What to do? Well, rather than fight it, go with it. Use the cell phone as a classroom learning tool rather than a diversion. It speaks to the daily experience of many students who rely on their cell phones not only for telephonic communication but also as timepieces, cameras, video and audio recorders, and particularly for text messaging. With the latter in mind, the cell phone actually makes a wonderfully interactive, multi-media learning tool and an invaluable teaching aid for my annual introductory lecture on Canadian media pioneer and communications scholar Marshall McLuhan. His famed, iconic proclamation that “the medium is the message,” or that informatic content is shaped primarily by its method of delivery is never more obvious than when students are tasked with communicating only by text message under the clinical conditions used in this activity; one that leaves them with a newfound appreciation for lucidity and authenticity in an age of instant communication. This model can be used for almost any type of lesson in any type of class. This is but one option…LOL as they say…

The Teaching Activity…

**Key Points:**
- Students use their own cell phones – participation voluntary
- Text messages sent to a local number written on the board
- Number receiving the messages belongs to instructor
- Strict time limit used for the composition & sending of messages
- Random, anonymous sampling of messages written on the board

The Learning Goals…

**Key Points:**
- “Instant” communication doesn’t always mean effective communication
- What gets lost in translation in a system of shorthand & emoticons?
- Speed vs. Sincerity, Style vs. Substance

N.B. This exercise is not intended to vilify the use of text messaging which of course has many redeeming qualities, but rather, to use the cell phone as a pedagogical vehicle that allows students to engage McLuhanian theory—an often cumbersome, opaque topic in media scholarship—by prompting them to re-evaluate how their own ideas about effective communication are shaped by commercial media products. In this exercise students learn through their own cell phones that fifty years and a digitized world later, the medium is still the message, and that text messaging is just the latest example of the way in which the content, the form, and the audience are all interdependent.