

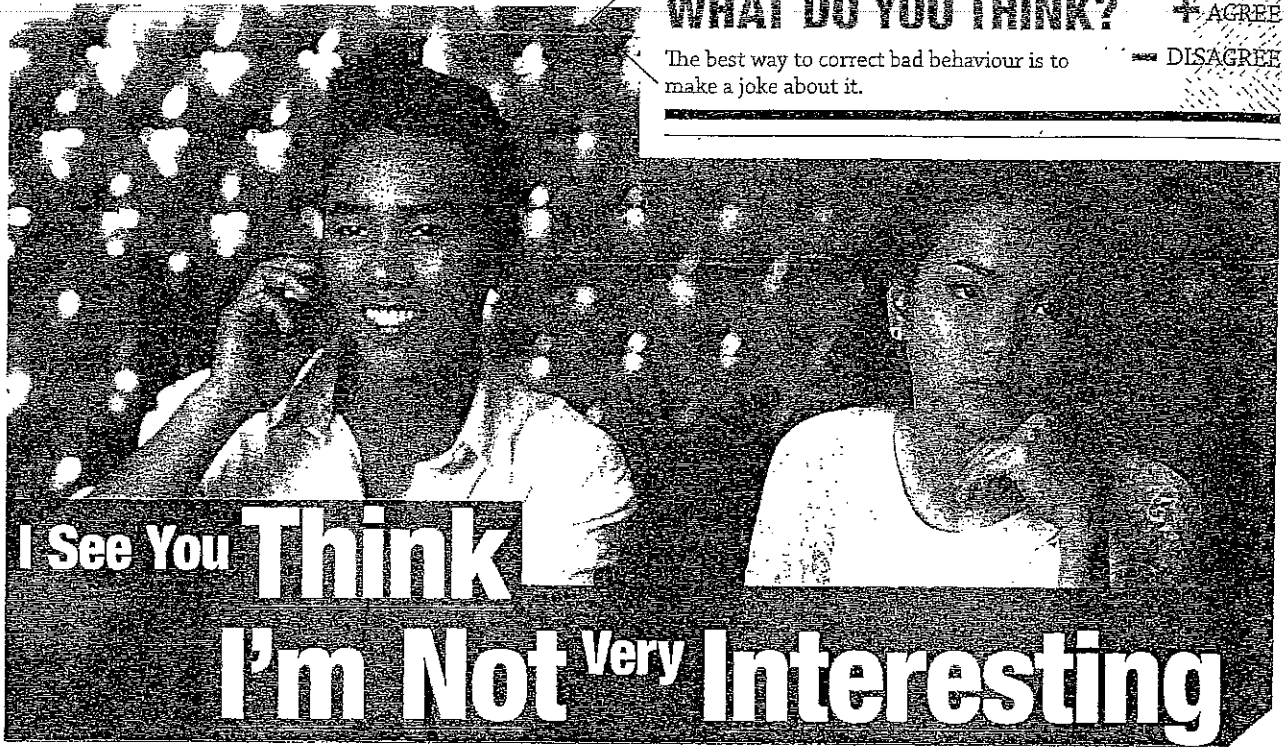
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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

+ AGREE

The best way to correct bad behaviour is to make a joke about it.

- DISAGREE



An open letter to the person with whom I was having a nice conversation until he looked down at his phone and started pecking away at the keyboard for, like, 10 minutes.

Open Letter by Scott Feschuk

Dear Señor Jerkface,

I'm not a big "manners" person. I don't care which fork you use to eat your salad, so long as it's not mine. But while you and I are dining together, perhaps you would deign to keep your hands and eyes off your mobile phone for more than 30 seconds at a time.

No? Very well—might I see your device for a moment? How sleek and stylish! And how very clumsy of me to accidentally drop it into my soup, then drop the soup into a crocodile, then push the crocodile out of a helicopter.

Don't get me wrong: I understand how important it is for you to stay in constant, utterly relentless touch with your many friends, avatars, and close, personal LinkedIn contacts. I grasp what a gruelling ordeal it now will be for your Twitter followers to go 90 whole minutes without knowing precisely where you stand on quantitative easing or the introduction of Cousin Oliver on *The Brady Bunch*. On the other hand: I AM SITTING RIGHT HERE.

Ah, I see you have a second phone. And I am all out of crocodiles. So be it.

Forgive me for interjecting as you enter the thir exciting minute of "texting a buddy," but perhaps you have heard of a new gimmick meant to restore actual human eye contact to meals. Upon arriving at a restaurant, all those who are dining together must place their phones in the middle of the table: The first person to reach for his or her device is obliged to pick up the entire dinner tab. I for one think this is a great idea but would add one small tweak: Everyone at the table should also get to stab that person in the hand with a fork.

I take it from your reaction that you don't support this—and also that my fork hurts.

Let me assure you, dear friend, that I am not blind to the virtues of the smartphone. It empowers instant communication. It enhances workplace productivity especially if your company is in the business of obliterating green cartoon pigs. Plus, as you have demonstrated, it provides a convenient way to let people know they are not very interesting.

RESPONDING

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SYNTHESIZING

Reread this letter to determine just how serious Scott Feschuk is about the issue of people using cellphones when they're with someone else. What details in the text indicate the depth of his feelings about the issue? What new ideas or understanding do you have about this issue after reading his letter?

ANALYZING FORM

Discuss what the characteristics of an open letter might be, considering the model provided by Feschuk. What is the purpose of this form? Who is the audience?

METACOGNITION

Identify the allusions to people or events in this open letter that you understand and those that you don't. How does understanding or not understanding an allusion affect your response to the letter?

TASKS

DEVELOPING A SCENE

Create a script based on this letter in which Feschuk and his dinner partner have a conversation before, during, and after the cellphone incident. Base your dialogue on what you can infer about their personalities. Rehearse and present your scene.

WRITING AN OPEN LETTER

Based on this letter, consider how Feschuk would respond in similar situations (e.g., if someone cuts in front of him in line for a movie, or if a store clerk is talking on the phone while ringing up his purchase). In an open letter, explore the situation and respond to it as if you were Feschuk. Try to capture his tone, but use your own words and ideas to respond.

This used to be much harder in the olden days, when you'd have to use subtle signals like theatrical yawning. Now, when your friends start telling you about the accomplishments of their children, you can simply glance at your device. It's a real time saver.

Ah, your phone is vibrating yet again. I sense my opportunity approaching.

YOU: Sorry, I just need to ...

You lapse into silence.

ME: Hey, can I have one of your kidneys?

YOU: (*distracted*) Mmm hmm.

ME: Great!

YOU: (*looking up*) Sorry, what did you just say?

ME: (*reaching for scalpel*)

I agree you are by no means alone in your habits. In the days before the last federal election, I sat down for drinks with five Ottawa journalists—and at one point, ALL OF THEM lapsed into silence, staring into their phones. I didn't know what to do. Should I look at my phone and pretend I had an urgent message to return? Would five smartphones even fit inside a crocodile?

Perhaps you've been led to believe that your station in life is of sufficient importance that you are justified in the comically habitual checking of your emails and texts. And maybe you're right! After all, there are three groups of people who get a free pass to constantly gaze at their phones during dinner:

1. Brain surgeons who abruptly left in the middle of brain surgery and are checking in to see if maybe they ought go back and finish the brain surgery.
2. Current presidents of the United States of America (basketball scores only).
3. Cuba Gooding Jr. (When so few job offers come your way, you simply can't be tardy in replying.)

If you don't fit into one of these categories, perhaps you could hold off on using your phone until you pretend to need to go to the bathroom, but later I discover you were actually in there re-tweeting the results of Tony Clement's squash game. ♦

ANALYZING CONVENTIONS

Consider the various ways writers can emphasize certain words, such as using all caps, italic, or boldface. Ask yourself: How does Scott Feschuk expect his readers to read the words in all caps? What other words in the letter could have been treated the same way?