

For Conversation, Press #1

by Michael Alvear

I've got a cell phone, e-mail, and voice mail. So why am I so lonely?

A funny thing happened on the way to the communications revolution: we stopped talking to one another.

I was walking in the park with a friend recently, and his cell phone rang, interrupting our conversation. There we were, walking and talking on a beautiful sunny day and—poof!—I became invisible, absent from the conversation.

The park was filled with people talking on their cell phones. They were passing other people without looking at them, saying hello, noticing their babies or stopping to pet their puppies. Evidently, the untethered electronic voice is preferable to human contact.

The telephone used to connect you to the absent. Now it makes people sitting next to you feel absent. Recently I was in a car with three friends. The driver shushed the rest of us because he could not hear the person on the other end of his cell phone. There we were, four friends zooming down the highway, unable to talk to one another because of a gadget designed to make communication easier.

Why is it that the more connected we get, the more disconnected I feel? Every advance in communications technology is a setback to the intimacy of human interaction. With e-mail and instant messaging over the Internet, we can now communicate without seeing or talking to one another. With voice mail, you can conduct entire conversations without ever reaching anyone. If my mom has a question, I just leave the answer on her machine.

As almost every conceivable contact between human beings gets automated, the alienation index goes up. You can't even call

a person to get the phone number of another person anymore. Directory assistance is almost always fully automated.

Pumping gas at the station? Why say good-morning to the attendant when you can swipe your credit card at the pump and save yourself the bother of human contact?

Making a deposit at the bank? Why talk to a clerk who might live in the neighborhood when you can just insert your card into the ATM?

Pretty soon you won't have the burden of making eye contact at the grocery store. Some supermarket chains are using a self-scanner so you can check yourself out, avoiding those annoying clerks who look at you and ask how you are doing.

⑩ I am no Luddite. I own a cell phone, an ATM card, a voice-mail system, an e-mail account. Giving them up isn't an option—they're great for what they're intended to do. It's their unintended consequences that make me cringe.

More and more, I find myself hiding behind e-mail to do a job meant for conversation. Or being relieved that voice mail picked up because I didn't really have time to talk. The industry devoted to helping me keep in touch is making me lonelier—or at least facilitating my antisocial instincts.

So I've put myself on technology restriction: no instant messaging with people who live near me, no cell-phoning in the presence of friends, no letting the voice mail pick up when I'm home.

What good is all this gee-whiz technology if there's no one in the room to hear you exclaim, "Gee whiz"?

"For Conservation, Press #1" by Michael Alvear in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Nov. 26, 1999. Copyright © 1999, used by permission of the author.

1. Which statement **best** expresses the author's main point?
- A Communications technology is interfering with human contact.
 - B People are communicating less than they did in the past.
 - C The advances in communications technology are unnecessary.
 - D People are forgetting how to communicate with others.
2. Which **best** explains the purpose of the questions the author asks throughout the selection?
- A They reveal the author's confusion about technology.
 - B They invite the reader to disagree with the author.
 - C They highlight the author's examples and arguments.
 - D They challenge the reader to find answers to problems.
3. Which **best** describes the author's tone throughout the selection?
- A amused
 - B critical
 - C hostile
 - D indifferent
4. What is **most** emphasized about cell phones in the third and fourth paragraphs?
- A how convenient they are
 - B how they threaten safety
 - C how they isolate people
 - D how efficient they are
5. Based on the context of paragraph 10, *Luddite* refers to what?
- A a person who rejects technology
 - B a person who embraces change
 - C a person who enjoys solitude
 - D a person who works well with others

6. What bothers the author *most* about the effect of communications technology on his life?
- A He has stopped communicating with the clerks at the grocery store.
 - B People no longer bother to say “Hello” to him when he walks in the park.
 - C His friends would rather talk on their cell phones than talk to him.
 - D Technology is detracting from meaningful interaction.

End of Sample Items

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EOC English I Sample Items

Selection Title	Question Number	Correct Answer	Thinking Skill	Objective Number
For Conversation, Press #1	1	A	Analyzing	3.04
For Conversation, Press #1	2	C	Analyzing	3.04
For Conversation, Press #1	3	B	Analyzing	3.01
For Conversation, Press #1	4	C	Analyzing	3.04
For Conversation, Press #1	5	A	Generating	6.01
For Conversation, Press #1	6	D	Analyzing	3.04