

# 2016 Scholarship Essay: 3rd Place

## Driver Safety by Nour Qushair

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December 1st, 2015. 17 years old. And just like every other 17 year old, my phone is with me at all times. Over the past month I have sent over 1000 text messages, but rest assured none of those texts were sent behind the wheel. I am lucky enough to have been raised by what some would call "overprotective" parents who feel the need to tell me every possible negative outcome that could happen based on my actions or decisions. "You know if you eat and swim right after, you'll get a stomach ache." "If you stay up late on a school night, you risk falling asleep in class." But the one warning that struck the most was said last year, when I was 16 years old. "Eleven teens die every day due to texting and driving." That was enough to make sure my phone was off limits whenever I was behind the wheel. Now imagine if every parent told

their teenage son or daughter that statistic. 34 percent of teens text and drive (Texting and Driving Safety). This is not because 34 in 100 teen drivers find their text worth putting their lives or other drivers' lives at stake. This is because 55 percent of them think texting and driving is "easy" (Texting and Driving Safety). And why wouldn't they? 48 percent of them have seen their parents text and drive (Texting and Driving Safety). What if instead of condoning this dangerous act, we told the parents that they are partaking in what is now officially the leading cause of their own kids.

Because children are in school and parents are at work, it is much easier to reach out to teenagers about texting and driving. School administrations have the power to host assemblies about certain topics. Companies, however, do not have that flexibility. This is why every high school in the nation should host an informative assembly that focuses on the dangers of texting of driving. My school held a mandatory assembly that discussed not only the hazards of texting and driving but included personal stories. These personal accounts were told from the victim's side as well as the committer's side. I found it very effective to include the offender's story because it showed the viewers how guilty he/she was and how he/she would live with this guilt for the rest of their life. These people were not heartless. They did not feel their text was more important than a person's life, but they did not make the connection between the texting and driving and someone's life until it was too late.

And, although I already knew the dangers of texting and driving, I was more empowered than ever to increase awareness to the dangers of texting and driving. This is why my friends have attempted "#X" but later switched to putting our phones on airplane mode or simply turning it off when driving. "#X" was discussed in the assembly briefly. It is a cause created by AT&T to stop texting and driving. The idea is when someone is about to drive, he/she uses "#X" to pause the conversation. Unfortunately #X has been proven to be ineffective amongst the majority (McDermott). Although #X was a good idea, it relies on not only the driver to stop texting but the driver's friends to respect "#X". Instead of focusing on making others stop texting the driver, why not just ensure the driver never receives the texts? Airplane mode is a feature on every single smartphone that gets rid of all features of a smartphone that needs either wifi or data, including texting. This is a better approach than #X because it does not rely on others to stop texting the driver; rather the driver is separated from his mobile device for as long as he is driving. Furthermore, airplane mode can be a "transition" for individuals who would otherwise text and drive. When a smoker decides to stop smoking cold turkey, it often does not work. This is why smokers tend to use healthier alternatives such as nicotine patches and electronic cigarettes. Similarly, many individuals are addicted to their smartphones but rather than a chemical addiction like cigarettes, this one is a mental addiction. According to Huffington Post, nearly 50% of Americans say they could not live without their phone. So rather than

having drivers turn off their phone and feel as if something is missing in their lives, they can simply put it on airplane mode while driving.

The root of the texting and driving problem is not negligence but unawareness. The fine for texting and driving is 25 dollars and increases in increments of 25 after each offense. With this method, a driver can text and drive three times, risk their lives and others' lives three times, for a mere 75 dollars. Littering is a fine of at least 250. And although littering is by no means a good thing to do, it does not have the capability to risk the lives of millions. A fine of 25 dollars does not reflect the urgency of stopping this hazardous act. And in order to bring awareness to the dangers of texting and driving, we need to implement a deterrent that mirrors the hazards texting behind the wheel causes. But increasing the price of a penalty is not enough. Money does not delineate the atrocities that can be caused by texting and driving. Statistics can only speak so much and we cannot force everyone to put their phone on airplane mode. In order to connect the risks of texting and driving to American drivers, we need a comparison that will shock the nation.

According to Harvard Center for Risk Analysis Study, each year 6,000 deaths are caused by using a cell phone while driving (United States Department of Transportation). 9/11 took the lives 2,977 people. Distracted driving is killing over twice as many people every single year as to the worst terror attack in U.S. The worst part is all these deaths are preventable. Americans on

September 11th 2001 had no choice but to watch our World Trade Center crumble to the ground killing over 2,000 people. We were stunned by the atrocities, heartbroken for the victims. Today, 2016, we have a voice. We can choose whether or not those 6,000 deaths will occur annually. We can decide if eleven teens are going to die daily. This time Americans have the power to save American lives. Who would feel compelled to pick up their phone behind the wheel after hearing they could save lives simply by not clicking "send"? No one would. And if no one did, 1.6 million car crashes would not occur, 330,000 injuries would not happen annually, and eleven more teens will arrive home to tell their parents "I love you".

December 2nd, 2015. Just turned 18 years old. From the time I have started this essay to the time I have completed it, eleven teens have died in the US. I was lucky enough to make it to the age of 18. In the span of 24 hours, eleven teens have not been as lucky. And in one year, over 4000 teens will not be as lucky. We have the power to change this by educating our community about the consequences of texting while driving.