

In the Classroom 37

Find More Time with Text Expansion

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. I think it's going to be a great episode. I know you can be doing other things, but you're hanging out with me and I really appreciate it. This week, we are going to look at a tool that can save you an amazing amount of time. One of the things that I wanted to do was introduce you to tools that can make your life easier, and this is definitely one of them. It is a Text Expander. This specific tool that I use is called Text Expander. I just purchased a yearly license for this application. I love it so much that I also apply it as an affiliate. I haven't been approved yet, but I'm going to recommend the product and if you like it, I would appreciate using my link as I put it in there in the future, so really great tool.

I would be using this tool regardless of my attempted affiliate connection, but I just want to make sure that I'm upfront with that, that sometimes I offer things and I do it as an affiliate and this helps me pay for this podcast, I get a few pennies thrown my way and it helps with the cost. If you participate, I appreciate it, if you go through the other link, I appreciate it too. If you listen to this podcast I appreciate it.

Anyways let's get to the meat of this. What is a Text Expander? A Text Expander very simply is you type in a shortcode and suddenly a block of text appears that is it but it's magical, and the reason I say it's magical is it will save you all those keystrokes that you can be doing other things because you are not really typing thing. For example, I have probably three or four signature blocks, depending on what I'm doing. I have my signature blocks for work, I have signature blocks from my side hustle, I have my personal signature block, I also have a signature block for volunteer organizations. I have a lot of signature block.

I can have a file where I have cut and paste and I can pull those in and use those over and over and over again. That's what I used to do until I started using the Text Expander. Now with a Text Expander, I put a semi-colon and the phrase my SIG, and suddenly my personal signature block will appear that is, you don't know how much time that is personally saved me. I can also put a semi-colon and TC SIG and my side hustle for two bucks consulting signature block will show up or semi-colon, JCC SIG and suddenly my Jamestown Community College signature will show up. I can do this across all the programs that I'm using. That is just one little example on how I'm using this. I first figured out about Text Expanders and really the importance of them. I mean I figured him out, like through Microsoft Word, they have auto-correction and I knew about that and I would play with that a little bit and that was quite useful, but I really got the understand the power of the Text Expander by listening to some of these productivity podcasts, like *The Productivity Show* from Asian Efficiency.

They really touted the power of these Text Expander. I started exploring more and I started applying some of the strategies that they had put in place. I'm finding out it's saving me an amazing amount of time and just doing regular routine things. The first Text Expander that I use was called Phrase Express. I purchase-- be able to purchase a license for it, but I had to load that onto my individual computers. I had a Chromebook, and I couldn't load Phrase Express. That was one of the things that had me looking around for another Text Expander because I wanted to use this text expanding capability on my Chromebook. Then I came up to program called Text Expander. Not only could I download it to my computers, and they would sync and now syncs across all my computers. If I add a new phrase, it's basically stored in the cloud and it's available on all the computers. I can load it as an application, but more importantly to me, because I do so much stuff in the cloud, is I have it as a Chrome extension, that is absolutely game-changing.

The fact that I have that as an extension, I have my snippets with me everywhere, and that's what you basically call that combination. It's a snippet. It's a little piece of content that you're going to put somewhere else. Now as I noted, there's other text expanding capabilities built into other programs. Probably the most common one if you've ever experienced it is Microsoft Word, and they have what is called Auto-correction. It's an auto-correct tool. You've probably seen, this you'll type a word and all sudden miraculously it'll change and you know something changed and the odds are that you typed in the word incorrectly and it auto corrected to the way that it's supposed to be. Now, this can be frustrating if the word that you either corrected was correct in the first place, but it was used a different way, so you have to make those modifications.

The nice thing about those auto-correction tools is when you have common words, you can add them to that dictionary, but you can also add blocks of text. When you type in, for example, if I was going to have the address block for the college I work at, that I could type in JCC add or ADD, JCCADD and it would expand into this whole signature block. I could put that into Microsoft Word into the auto-correct and every time I type that, it would show up. That's great, but the problem is, it's restricted to Microsoft Word or the Microsoft environment. It can also tie into Outlook. That's really useful. I mean, those things can be useful, you can create your own signature blocks in there and have them show up and that's definitely useful but a true Text Expander takes it to the next level and the fact that you can work across applications and use the tool to save you time. Saving time allows you to do other things, other things that are maybe more important or you can put focus in a different area because you've created this efficiency. Why use this Text Expander? For me, it's more accuracy and just more efficiency in what I'm doing that I can save time.

It was put to me that if you are doing the same thing more than three times, you need to automate this. That it's time to automate. If you are typing the same phrase over and over and over again, you need to automate it so you can reduce the amount of typing that you're doing and over time, you're saving all this extra time. For example, and I'll dive into this later when you are grading, you typically see you the same grading issues over and over and over again. If you happen to be an English instructor, for example, that you're going to probably comment on the difference between active and passive voice. You want to have thorough feedback, you put in this thorough feedback, and then you see it again, and then you see it again. Then it's on another paper and

you see it multiple times. Then 30 papers later, this is tremendously time-consuming if you want to give them good, robust feedback for that issue, it can be exhausting.

What you can do is use this Text Expander where you can provide that wonderful feedback because you wrote it once you have links in it, and you can provide that great feedback but with a shortcode, you can insert that feedback and so that is where it happened. Normally, an educator if they're an experienced educator, and they're reviewing papers, and they see the same common errors, will probably create a document where they have these snippets of feedback on this document and you will normally cut and paste from that. Well, that also takes time that you're cutting and pasting. It's certainly more efficient than typing it in, but you're still spending energy cutting and paste. Now you can take that document with all those feedback snippets and put it into a Text Expander and short it down to a shortcode. When you're going through the paper, your fingers never leave the keyboard and you hit that shortcode, and bam, there is that information instantly. That helps to speed up what you're doing.

From there, you can always add that personal touch. You can always make it better and localize that information for that particular student, so it's not all boilerplate, but it gives you someplace to start. This, therefore, allows you to do other things. I am one who tries to automate routine tasks as much as possible so I can then focus on personalized service. It just allows me to be able to work with more people because I've spent time and energy doing this. Already, as I'm talking through this, I'm thinking of other examples that I'm going to implement, things that I commonly see. When I do course reviews, we use a rubric, but there's these snippets of information and I know that I'm writing the same thing over and over may be in a different way each time, but if I can really craft a good response, then I can just use a shortcode to pop that in and then personalize it further from there.

Another way that I'm using it, is for my book reviews. I have a template that I have, and when I draft up a book review, I do it in Google. Now with a short snippet, I can have my template sitting right in front of me and I can address all the things that I need to address. Bonni Stachowiak who runs the podcast *Teaching in Higher Ed*, she uses a similar process for doing her show notes. By the way, if you have not listened to *Teaching in Higher Ed*, you should. Awesome show. I'm a huge fan of what she's doing and the wonderful people that she's connecting with so definitely check her out but anyways these are ways that I can improve.

Let's talk a little bit about Text Expander. Text Expander, basically, is a program where you can create a snippet. A snippet is a combination of that shortcode that you're going to type in and a larger piece of text and so that is really the basics of it. The nice thing is you can group these snippets into groups and these groups, you can organize around--

One group that I joined and that's the capability that Text Expander has. I joined a public group that has thank-you phrases for multiple language. All the snippets are in one place so I can just go to there, I can figure out what the shortcut is, type it in and use it. Now, shortcodes they use often, you don't have to worry about because you've probably got to memorize but after a while, you may start collecting all these other

shortcodes and just by having them grouped, you can find them quicker when you need them.

You can also, with Text Expander, basically nest snippets together. You may have instructions that you are going to put into an email so you've crafted this email that refer to maybe a date in the future so something that's going to happen next week and you write in there that I will send you this information by a week from today which will be certain date. You can create a snippet for that particular date and then also embed it into this larger text block that you're doing so when it actually populates into whatever you're doing, maybe an email message that it will also run that other snippet and give you the correct day that you expect to get back to them.

You can nest these things and that is-- I haven't played with that yet but that's something that I'm going to be working on because I use those very often that I'm trying to schedule something or that I know that I will get back to them but it'll be a certain day and you can do those calculations in Text Expander. Text Expander and I didn't know this until I started doing research for this particular episode is you can create fill in the blank so when you are going to generate a particular snippet, it will pop up, ask you to fill in certain blanks, certain fields that you have and then when you hit submit, it will generate with all that information in there.

Bonni Stachowiak when she was showing her example with her show notes, she had a space for what episode it was, who the guest was, what recommended products that they- what what tools that they were recommending and this was pretty cool, that she would fill this out and boom there that information was and also, Text Expander will allow you to manipulate date and be able to move your carriage return, your cursor, things like that so it has macros and Date code and all these little tools that gives you a little more capability that it's just not pasting text, that you can have a little more- I don't have a good word for this.

Basically, you can control what you're doing just a little more so it'll speed up your process a little more. You may put this information in but you want your carriage return to move to the top so you can put somebody's name in as you're creating an email message, for example. That is certainly a capability that I'm going to be exploring soon.

How about some ideas for how to use a Text Expander? I have collected just a variety of ideas and this will give you some things to think about. One of the features, for example, that you can create your own little snippet for pasting clipboard in plain text and what does this mean? You can go in and use the control copy to copy some information. Normally, if you copy from Microsoft Word and you put it into a web browser, into a field, it brings all this code with it and it's just miserable trying to clean that up so one of the capabilities is, you can use control shift V on a PC in order to paste it as plain text or you can create your own keyboard shortcuts.

I created one that has a exclamation mark C so when I type !C, it will paste whatever I had in from my clipboard copied it into the virtual memory and it will paste it cleanly without any formatting and it'll strip all the formatting out. That is a great tool for just copying text from something that's rich formatted and that you just want the plain text

so you can then mark it up properly for your web browser. That is a tool. I've set that up and I've already been using it and it's worked absolutely marvelously.

The other place that I use Text Expander is signature blocks. Like I said, I have multiple signature blocks. With a shortcode, bam, I can get the right one and pop that into my emails.

All your emails should have a signature block. The problem is I use, for example, my Gmail for different purposes and so I can always have a signature block pasted but I may not have the right signature block and so now, I can put the right signature block or when I'm responding to students in the learning management system, I can pop the correct signature block I want to use right in and it's only a few keystrokes.

Frequently typed items. If you are typing the same thing over and over and over again, it's time to automate. It could be a certain phrase that you use, it could be maybe you just finished writing an article and you want to tell the world about it and you don't want to keep cutting and pasting but you want to make sure that you get it out and it's formatted the way you want it and it has links because sometimes links can be a little crazy and you can put this into Text Expander and then with a shortcode, anytime that you want to refer to that article that you wrote or a podcast episode or what have you, that you can put that code in there and bam they're a go.

I have created snippets for date and time or mostly dates that when I put in DD or D-Date, right, D-Date that I will get today's date in the format of the day of the week so Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday all that, comma and then and the number day, the month written out and the year. I basically type D-Date and bam, there's that information so it gives me what today is. If I'm referencing tomorrow, for example, I have another one set up for T-Date as in tomorrow date and that will insert and then I also have one from a week from today. F-Date seven so future date seven and that will insert the day and all that information a week from now because I have found out that when I'm communicating by email, that sometimes there's confusion on making sure all the dates and everything jive and so when you're scheduling appointments, that this helped to clarify all that.

Putting your bio as a snippet. A short bio. If you are going out and speaking, one of the things they want you to do is give your bio. If you happen to write an article and it's going to be published, they want your bio and so what you can do is ahead of time, because I can never find my bio. I know I have it. I've squirreled it away somewhere and I have to always go through and do a search and now I have created a bio, I can put it into Text Expander and I may have different bios. Once again, doing voluntary work, I have my volunteer bio and I also have one for work and I have one for my side hustles so I have different bios written and so now I can pull these up with a short snippet.

Candyman with responses. Very often, you'll have the same questions asked in class and you'll go through the syllabus and you'll make improvements to it hoping to reduce those questions but you'll still get some of the same questions and so you can put together a candy email response that you can pull together with a short few keystrokes and there it is and then you can always localize this information further so that saves

a huge amount of information. For example, we do OER and one of the things people ask like, "Hey, can you tell me where the form is that I need to fill out dealing with OER?" I've created a candy response and then all I have to do is type in my shortcode so ;OER, bam, and all that information, all the details are provided and I can just send that an email message on. Once again, you can personalize this with those fill in the blank fill-ins that Text Expander has available to you.

Markdown language. Markdown language is a way that you can write tech, basically plain tech that you can then put it into a web browser and it will then-- like WordPress and it will convert it into rich tech and so you can go through all the codes for markdown language and as opposed to spelling out the HTML codes or you can do the HTML codes. It doesn't matter but you can use markdown language in the snippets that you have and this will help speed things up as you say writing a blog post.

Autocorrection. Microsoft Word has auto-correction already but you can also use Text Expander for words that you typically get wrong or certain phrases. There are certain things that I just type wrong all the time and it's not because I don't know how to type them correctly, it's sometimes my fingers and brain are just not working together like they should. For some reason, certain words always come out wrong and Text Expander is a way that I can just correct that. You may want to expand abbreviations and so for example, Jamestown Community College. If I typed in JJCC, so two Js, as a shortcode then it would write out Jamestown Community College. Saves a few keystrokes and if you do this often, it saves a lot of keystrokes.

Things just build up over time. You may have one of those acronyms that's just massive and every once in a while you need to write it out. What you can do is, add an extra letter before your acronym or your abbreviation and it'll spell it all out.

Ipsum Lorem text. If you happen to be a web designer, web builder you're laying things out, there's fake text called Ipsum Lorem that you can insert. What you can do is, go to a site that has it and you can go and capture that information or you can create your own Ipsum Lorem text and just type Lorem or ;Lorem. It will just pop that text in there and you can do it as many times for as much text as you need. That will help speed things up. Speaking of laying things out or coding, you can also create blocks of code that you would normally use.

When you start a Website, there are certain blocks of code that you need. You need the HTML tag, you need the header tag, you need the body tag, just as a start before you even start coding. You can plug this in and just pull that out by a shortcode and it'll fill in all that information. It'll be accurate because you've already cleaned it up and tested it. You can also do it with other codes like paragraph tags.

Most codes have a starting tag and an ending tag and so you can type for example, ;p or #p or whatever that you want and then it will automatically add those specific codes. It just speeds up the process of doing your coding. Now, some HTML editors will do this stuff for you. Once again, if you're just using a text editor you can do this yourself.

Grading. Talked about grading a little bit and one of the places that you want to start is, creating these boilerplate comments that you can then personalize later. These comments could have really detailed instructions and have links to other references. If you're talking about APA, you can take them right to the AOL and the specific page and show them how to fix their issues.

Ryan Cordell, he had an article called *Smarter Typing Through Text Expansion*. He points out, if you're going to use these boilerplates, you're probably going to want to let your students know this ahead of time. They're going to compare comments and just explain how and why you're using them and also teach them how to be more efficient. Sarah Brown, she had an article called *The Magic of Text Expanding: Typing Code a Paragraph appears*.

Recommends that you have really two snippets for each of the errors that you see. If you have a passive voice, you have a very detailed description about passive voice and links and all this. Then you have a shorter one that just references, "Here's another instance of passive voice" for example. The first one is when you're putting in your acronyms that the first one you spell out in detail and the second one you can just use your acronym. This is the same thing. I think it's a great idea and you probably will have to put together a cheat sheet so you can have these codes in front of you for that particular lesson. Then, anytime you're creating a new one, you pop in a new code. Put it into text expander.

Languages. Languages are another place where you can definitely use text expansion. One place is, these accent characters are special characters that you're going to use.

You can create shortcuts to these special characters and pop them in. You can certainly use the numeric codes that are out there for extensions but sometimes it's just lot easier. It's easier in my brain than if I have something you know that I can use an !, for example, to get an accented I, whatever I want. You can do this with any symbols. Math symbols, Greek letters, Latin phrases that use money symbols whatever that you can set them up in Text Expander and then pull them out as you need that.

If you are getting into creative comments and you are developing content or you need to reference content then you can create various snippet pull out the exact information that you need for this creative comments license. You can just, with a short keystroke, pop it right in. Those are some quick ideas that I had for you, but also, let me share a couple of ideas for success.

One of the things that I do is use a standard prefix. I use a semicolon a lot and depending on what I'm doing, but a semicolon is a frequent character because there's always a space after it. The fact that I'm using it without the space helps to identify it as a shortcode. I will put a ;Ahref which will produce a whole phrase, dealing with what I'm doing book reviews that I want to add some HTML code so they can read more.

For my book reviews, it's ;bookreview and I type that in and I have my whole template suddenly appear. That's how I use it, that I have the standard prefix.

Thanh Pham from Asian efficiency, he has different ones that he use. The semicolon he uses, frequent shortcuts that he has. He puts a pound sign for phone numbers. £Stan would get me my phone number.

He uses an exclamation mark for any time he has addresses. I can put £Stan and then I would get my address put in there. He uses a period for a symbol. In his case, he has multiple telephone numbers. He uses £NL or £US to get his phone numbers, or !NL or !US in order to get the appropriate addresses. Another strategy for a prefix that I've started to use and you can see with my D-Date and T-Day comes from Helmut Hauser. He recommends doubling the first letter of the code, that way you can keep it unique. If I wanted to spell out Jamestown Community College, I put JJCC and it would spell it out. That wouldn't be a common spelling.

Another tip for success is subscribe to public snippets. There's already a list of different public groups and you can find this at techexpander.com/publicgroup. For example, being able to say thanks in different languages. Those hard to find symbols, emojis, medical abbreviations, formatting for slack, HTML and CSS coding, past and future dates. Just all kinds of different ones that they've put together. Those are some of the ways that you can get going a lot quicker.

All in all, this is a really powerful tool. I'm still figuring out other ways that I can put this in action. If you have any thoughts, certainly put them into the comments. I have comments in my blog, or you can put them-- I have basically put them anywhere and hopefully, I'll find them. I just encourage you to go check this thing out, I think you will find that it will change how you do business. I am tremendously excited about it. Before I let you go, here's a quick plug from my book.