When Technology, Safety, and Freedom Collide:  
The Issue of Texting While Driving

This assignment is required for all students taking College Composition I and Integrated College Composition I and must be submitted as one of the essays included in the final portfolio. You will be working on this assignment in class over a period of several days and will go through the process of prewriting, drafting, and revising. Please read this description carefully and be sure you understand all of the requirements.

**Assignment objectives**
By writing this paper, you will learn and practice how to:

- Use pre-writing strategies to develop ideas
- Revise in response to feedback on a draft
- Make decisions about how to write the essay based on the intended audience and purpose
- Analyze and respond to what other people have written on this issue
- Edit your grammar, spelling, and mechanics to meet the expectations of academic writing
- Use information from published sources to explore the issue and support your position
- Use Academic Search Premier to locate additional sources on your own
- Draw on your own experience and perceptions to discuss the issue
- Use informal citation to identify your sources
- Uphold academic integrity principles and avoid plagiarism
- Analyze and understand various points of view on the issue

**Background on the topic**
When the automobile was invented more than a century ago, it was seen as a boon to human transportation, but it brought with it some problems, among them the danger inherent in riding in a vehicle moving faster than any person had ever done before. Flash forward to our present era, when cell phone technology has grown so rapidly that it has almost completely changed the way humans communicate with each other. Now, the phenomena of the automobile and the cell phone have come together and the controversial issue of texting while driving has arisen.

Texting while driving is a behavior that grows more generally out of the almost obsessive need of many cell phone users to be “connected” 24/7, along with a strong propensity for multi-tasking. However, several studies, including one by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, have shown that texting while driving leads to a significant increase in accidents. Texting, it is argued, is a distraction that rivals far more notorious and illegal forms of distraction such as driving while under the influence of alcohol. As reported by *The New York Times*, nineteen states and the District of Columbia have banned texting while driving, and federal legislation is under consideration.
Enforcing the law and altering people's behavior have turned out to be enormous challenges. Many drivers are openly defiant, insisting that their multi-tasking poses no risk and/or arguing that the government has no right to regulate what a driver does in the privacy of his or her own vehicle.

Assignment description
Reflect on this issue and the potential impacts of texting while driving on the texters themselves, their passengers, all those sharing the road with texters, and our modern society in general. How does this issue compare with other behaviors that are restricted by the government because of safety concerns? How should we evaluate the evidence showing the dangers of texting while driving? How can we compel people to change their actions? Should we do so?

Develop and write an essay that addresses one of the following perspectives. The questions are meant to spark your thinking; your essay does not necessarily have to discuss all of them, nor are you restricted only to the questions that are suggested.

1. Many Americans, citing the right to individual freedom, have in the past objected to attempts by the government to enact laws that restrict personal behaviors even in the name of health or safety. Examples of these are mandatory seatbelt and helmet laws, smoking bans, and even prohibition of public use of alcohol by pregnant women. Given this historical context, is the movement to pass laws against texting while driving just another in a series of attempts by the government to control the lives of citizens and to take away their right to make personal behavioral decisions without interference from “big brother”? How is texting while driving similar to the behaviors mentioned above? How does it differ? Does the government have a legitimate stake in personal behaviors that have an impact on health and safety?

2. Numerous studies have shown that texting while driving is a significant distraction and leads to an increase in accidents. There are, however, studies with conflicting findings. Moreover, what these studies tell us is what the risks of such behaviors are; they do not tell us with certainty how any given individual deals with distractions. What is the evidence supporting the claim that texting while driving is dangerous? How does it compare to other types of distracted behavior behind the wheel, such as being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, eating, putting on makeup/using an electric shaver, fiddling with sound systems or navigation devices, even carrying on a conversation with passengers? And what about those drivers who insist they are expert “multi-taskers,” who can handle driving while composing, sending, reading, and responding to text messages just fine? Are those people correct? Or are they simply deluding themselves? What does the research say about the relative dangers presented by the above-mentioned distracted driving behaviors and the truth about the perceptions of those multi-tasking drivers?

3. The present and upcoming generations of drivers have grown up with technology; it is an integral part of their everyday lives. As more and more of these dedicated texters start to dominate the driving population, the problem will only intensify. What can be done to solve this problem before it escalates into a national crisis? Many possible solutions have been suggested or initiated. For instance, Oprah Winfrey has started a campaign against texting while driving and has a pledge on her website for drivers to sign promising never to engage in the behavior. Another solution might be stricter laws, better enforcement, larger fines – approaches that have been tried in other countries with varying degrees of success. In
addition, technology solutions are in development, using Bluetooth and satellites, that can shut down a driver’s ability to text and drive. Education on the issue – at home, in the media, in our schools – is another possible strategy. Education of our young people about the deadly nature of cigarette smoking has been fairly effective over the last 20 years or so, and fewer teens smoke now than in the past. What are the comparative merits of the strategies outlined above? Is this problem fundamentally different, or could it be addressed using strategies that have worked before? Which methods or combination of methods would you recommend as most effective in minimizing the dangers of texting and driving in the future?

This assignment can be interpreted in a variety of ways. You should begin with the required sources listed below to become informed about the issues. Through class discussions, supplementary activities, and/or additional research, your instructor will help you develop a specific focus and audience for your essay. A collection of resources is available on the First-Year Writing website to help you get ideas.

Source and research requirements
Your paper must refer to and include information from the following sources:

- Itkowitz, Colby. "Driving While ... Distracted." CQ Weekly Online (December 14, 2009): 2854.

Your instructor will provide or help you locate these sources. In addition to this source, you must also use information from at least one additional source that you find on your own using the library database Academic Search Premier. This source should be specific to your approach to the assignment. You may also include information from other kinds of sources as appropriate, including interviews, observations, and personal experience, as well as credible web sources.

Citations and references
List or describe all sources you used in the paper at the end under the heading References. Citation within the paper must be informal, using signal phrases and including selected information identifying the source within the sentence. Do not use formal parenthetical citations.

Length and due date
This essay must be at least three typed double-spaced pages in length (about 750 words). Your instructor will provide you with the due dates for drafts and revisions.

Academic integrity
As with all essays you write for this class, you are expected to do your own work. Sharing your essay with or copying your essay from another student is a Level 3 violation of the University's Academic Integrity Policy and will result in serious academic and disciplinary penalties as determined by the Academic Integrity Review Board.