

# Congrats, it's an emoji!



adapted from an article by Sarah Elbert

- 1 The next time you text a friend about plans for the evening, there's a good chance you'll spend longer searching for the perfect emoji to express your feelings and thoughts at that moment — grimace, sushi, running woman and all — than you do typing actual words.
- 2 Emoji have become ingrained parts of our daily lives, expressing our laughter, sadness, glee and fear in a few cartoony icons sent via text message, email or over social channels. They're available on clothes and pillows. They're so ubiquitous, in fact, that the "face with tears of joy" emoji was Oxford Dictionaries' 2015 word of the year; 17 since it's (obviously) not a word.
- 3 Emoji are used to express both convenient, low-risk emotional cues and our unparalleled wit. They transcend languages. Like ancient hieroglyphics written on cave walls, they often tell a story. But despite the publication of *Emoji Dick*, a crowd-sourced emoji translation of literary classic *Moby Dick*, don't go thinking that emoji will one day replace the written word entirely — just in case you were worried.
- 4 "Emoji and other forms of creative punctuation are the digital equivalent of making a face or a silly hand gesture while you're speaking," wrote internet linguist Gretchen McCulloch in *Mental Floss*. "You'd feel weird having a conversation in a monotone with your hands tied behind your back, but that's kind of what it's like texting in plain vanilla Standard English. But typing exclusively in emoji is like playing charades — it's fun for a while, but if you actually want to say anything complicated? . . ."
- 5 The universal set of emoji are "regulated," for lack of a better term, by the very unsexy- and unfunny-sounding Unicode Consortium, which gives each approved emoji its own universally recognized, unique code. The nonprofit consortium is an alliance of big tech companies, including Apple, Google, IBM, Microsoft, Facebook and others, that pay an annual fee of \$18,000 to vote on characters and other text decisions. Having one central coding depot ensures that devices created by competing companies recognize each other's text and symbols. Emoji make up just a small percentage of the many text codes issued by the organization.

- 6 The process of creating new emoji takes about 18 months from start to finish, and anyone can submit applications to the consortium for a new icon, along with the reasoning behind it. For example, a group called Emojination last year proposed a new "dumpling" emoji, which was moved forward as a candidate for consideration with the next release. In its academic proposal, the petitioners argued: "Dumplings are one of the most pervasive foods in the world, culinarily native to four continents and served on all seven continents, including Antarctica."
- 7 If the dumpling is approved — it's on a list of potential emoji that will be released as the Unicode 10.0 group in June 2017, which will then trickle down to your devices — it will be up to the various tech companies to decide how their specific dumpling will appear. That's why in the latest round of new emoji to be released, the "clown face" looks different on Samsung devices than it does on Apple iPhones; some are creepier — or, ahem, cuter — than others. It's up to the emoji designers at each company to interpret the approved characters.
- 8 Gedeon Maheux is one of the owners of the Greensboro, North Carolina-based Iconfactory, which has designed icons and emoji for tech companies such as Microsoft, Twitter and Facebook. Companies are looking for their own graphical emoji style that will stand out, says Maheux, who is also a designer. While The Iconfactory designs proprietary icons for various companies and apps, the only "true emoji" are ones that have come out of the Unicode Consortium, Maheux says. "Everything else is just an icon or sticker or whatever you want to call it."
- 9 Maheux has been designing icons for about 20 years — and he's been designing emoji since they came into existence with the introduction of mobile devices such as the iPhone. As a big Star Trek fan, he says, one of his favorite emoji is the "Live long and prosper" hand icon. "And, of course, you can't talk about emoji without mentioning the poop one," he says. "I've drawn more poops than I care to consider."

*Delta Sky, 2017*