

[1.23] Ray Kremer Interview on TI Student Feature page

(In February 2002, this interview with Ray Kremer appeared on the Features section of the TI Student web page.)

Ray Kremer, the Man Behind the "TI Calculator FAQ"

If you have ever visited the TI Discussion Groups, you know who he is. But did you ever wonder who the guy behind the legend is? Now's your chance to find out. He's Ray Kremer, and he'll advise you to "read this:"

Name:	Ray Kremer
Age:	23
Home:	Algonquin, IL
Current field of study:	Material Science (Master's Program), Purdue University
Field of undergraduate degree:	Chemistry, Bradley University, Peoria, IL
Motivation for choosing chemistry:	The family business, which involves selling chemicals to the metal finishing industry
Career plans:	Joining the family business full-time.

TI CONNECTION:

What was your first TI calculator?

I got a TI-85 under the Christmas tree in 1994. I spent the rest of the school break reading the manual.

Which TI products do you own?

A TI-86 and a couple of TI GraphLink cables.

What is your favorite TI product?

The TI-86 of course, although the TI-89 and TI-92 Plus are nothing to shake a stick at.

Within the TI community, what are you famous for?

I have written a fairly comprehensive list of Frequently Asked Questions about TI's graphing calculators. Although for sheer name recognition in the general TI community, I think some of the more prolific game authors have me beat. In the TI Discussion Groups I'm also famous (or is that infamous?) for replying to questions with a URL to my FAQ website instead of a direct answer.

When did you start visiting the TI Discussion Groups?

It was probably the fall of 1996 when I first wandered in.

What made you keep coming back?

The first time I came to the Discussion Groups, I went into the TI-85 area and read a few posts just out of curiosity about what was there. They were mostly questions of course, and I discovered that I could answer most of them just by virtue of having thoroughly read the manual. I rather enjoy helping people out, and it's a shame for students to not get the most out of their TI calculators, so I quickly became a regular fixture in the Discussion Groups.

How many hours do you spend on the Discussion Groups each week?

An average day's run through the new posts takes about an hour to an hour and a half, so that probably adds up to nine or ten hours in a week's time. It varies by season; summer tends to be a slow time, and the first month or two of the school year is very busy.

How much do you like the color orange?

Quite a bit, actually.

*So what's your *favorite* color?*

Well, uh, orange. Hence the background color of my home page and the color of the lettering of the FAQ's title graphic.

JUST THE FAQs, MA'AM:

How old is the TI Calculator FAQ?

I first wrote it during the summer of 1997, and it went up on the web a few days after I arrived at college that fall. Since then the main body has about tripled in size, and it has gained about a half dozen satellite pages.

How did you come up with the idea to start it?

When I first got a TI GraphLink cable, it took some time and research to get it properly configured on my computer, and I'm a computer savvy person. Naturally lots of people also have trouble hooking up their TI GraphLink, and I was regularly writing page-long responses in the TI GraphLink Discussion Group detailing all the things one might need to check in order to get it running. It got to be quite bothersome to retype this from scratch every week, and it occurred to me that if I could get the whole thing put up in some permanent location, I could just send everybody there, and I would never have to type it again. So the "dirty little secret" is that the main goal of the FAQ is to help me avoid typing when I respond to calculator questions. However, the system also allows me to deliver detailed and well-researched answers instead of having to answer things off the top of my head.

How did you get to be so knowledgeable about TI products?

Reading the manuals is most of it, and being naturally good at math helps. After that, it was just a matter of poking through TI's website and other TI-related websites that I ran across. The information is all out there; knowing where to find it is the main stumbling block. I also keep my ear to the ground for new information. Several items in the FAQ began as insights or reports from others in the Discussion Groups, and two of the math techniques listed are straight from my calculus teachers. There's also a handful of little tricks I came up with.

Do you call it the "F-A-Q" or the "fak?"

I use "fak."

GENERAL INTEREST:

What are your favorite TI-related websites?

The first things that come to my mind when you ask for well-done, useful TI-related sites are Doug Burkett's TI-TipList, Techno-Plaza, and ti-cas.org. I also frequent several other TI-related forums – TI-Programmers is one of the better ones.

What is your favorite time of day? I'm most active at night.

The problem is that I don't get tired after only a normal day's worth of being awake, so I'm usually still up when the sane people are in bed sleeping.

What are your hobbies (other than frequenting the TI Discussion Groups)?

I'll probably surprise no one in saying that I'm a sci-fi and anime geek. I also enjoy a good LEGO® Technic set. And video games of course, although my collection is more modest than most.

What is your favorite news source?

Talk radio.

What is the last book you read?

I'm currently working my way through a rather large stack of Star Trek novels... Disregarding those, I read *Good Omens* by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett during the holidays.

What is the best movie you've seen in the last six months?

I'd be remiss as a geek if I said anything other than *The Fellowship of the Ring*. *Harry Potter* was also excellent.

Who are your role models or sources of inspiration?

You can't grow up watching *Star Trek* and not be affected by that. If I were to wake up one morning with pointed ears, I probably wouldn't be too bothered by it.

How did you feel when you were asked to be a Student Center "Feature of the Month," an honor normally reserved for inanimate objects like products and support programs?

Flattered. Although I joke that my FAQ and I are a veritable cliché in the TI Discussion Groups, around the rest of the internet's TI community, it isn't anywhere near being a household name like the major game archive sites are. I feel like a local celebrity suddenly thrust into the national spotlight.