



The Essentials of Human Communication



Messages in the Media

30 Rock is a situation comedy that revolves around characters who could all use a good course in human communication. In this chapter we introduce the basics of human communication, explaining what it is and how it works.

Objectives



Listen to the **Audio Chapter** in **MyCommunicationLab**

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Identify the myths, skills, and forms of human communication.
- 2 Draw a model of communication that includes sources-receivers, messages, context, channel, noise, and effects; and define each of these elements.
- 3 Paraphrase the major principles of human communication.
- 4 Explain the role of culture in human communication, the seven ways in which cultures differ from one another, the aim of a cultural perspective; and define *ethnic identity* and *ethnocentrism*.
- 5 Define *communication competence* and explain the four qualities identified as part of competence.

Of all the knowledge and skills you have, those concerning communication are among your most important and useful. Your communication ability will influence how effectively you live your personal and professional life; it will influence your effectiveness as a friend and lover. It will often make the difference between getting a job and not getting it. Your communication skills will determine your influence and effectiveness as a group member and your emergence as group leader. Your communication skills will increase your ability to communicate information and influence the attitudes and behaviors of others in a variety of public speaking situations.

This first section introduces human communication, beginning with the skills and forms of human communication and some of the popular but erroneous beliefs that can get in the way of effective communication.

Preliminaries to Human Communication



Explore the Exercise
“I’d Prefer to Be” at
MyCommunicationLab

Human communication consists of the sending and receiving of verbal and nonverbal messages between two or more people. This seemingly simple (but in reality quite complex) process is the subject of this book, to which this chapter provides a foundation. Here we begin the study of human communication by looking first at the myths about communication (to get rid of them), the skills you’ll learn, and the forms of communication discussed here.

MYTHS ABOUT HUMAN COMMUNICATION

A good way to begin your study of human communication is to examine just a few of the popular but erroneous beliefs about communication, many of which are contradicted by research and theory. Understanding these myths and why they are false will help eliminate potential barriers and pave the way for more effective and efficient learning about communication.

- *The more you communicate, the better your communication will be.* Although this proposition seems logical—the same idea lies behind the popular belief that practice makes perfect—it actually is at the heart of much faulty learning. Practice may help make your communication perfect if you practice the right habits. But if you practice bad habits, you’re likely to grow less, rather than more, effective. Consequently, it’s important to learn and practice the principles of effectiveness.
- *When two people are in a close relationship, neither person should have to communicate needs and wants explicitly; the other person should know what these are.* This assumption is at the heart of many interpersonal difficulties. People aren’t mind readers, and to expect them to be sets up barriers to open and honest communication.
- *Interpersonal or group conflict is a reliable sign that the relationship or group is in trouble.* Conflict is inevitable in relationships and in groups. If the conflict is managed effectively, it may actually benefit the individuals and the relationship.
- *Like good communicators, leaders are born, not made.* Although some people are better suited to leadership than others, leadership, like communication and listening, is a learned skill. You’ll develop leadership abilities as you learn the principles of human communication and those unique to group communication and group leadership.
- *Fear of speaking in public is detrimental and must be eliminated.* Most speakers are nervous—and, to be perfectly honest, you’re probably not going to learn from this book or this course to eliminate what is commonly called stage fright or communication apprehension. But you can learn to *manage* your fear, making it work for you rather than against you; you can learn, and this is crucial, to become a more effective speaker regardless of your current level of anxiety.



Communication Choice Point Choices and Human Communication

Throughout this book you’ll find marginal items labelled Communication Choice Points. These items are designed to encourage you to apply the material discussed in the text to specific communication situations by first analyzing your available choices and then making a communication decision.

SKILLS OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION

Among the skills you'll learn through your study of human communication are these:

- **Self-presentation skills** enable you to present yourself as (and just for starters) a confident, likable, approachable, and credible person. It is also largely through your communication skills (or lack of them) that you display negative qualities.
- **Relationship skills** help you build friendships, enter into love relationships, work with colleagues, and interact with family members. These are the skills for initiating, maintaining, repairing, and sometimes dissolving relationships of all kinds.
- **Interviewing skills** enable you to interact to gain information, to successfully present yourself to get the job you want, and to participate effectively in a wide variety of other interview types. (This topic is covered in a separate supplement, *The Interviewing Guidebook*.)
- **Group interaction and leadership skills** help you participate effectively in relationship and task groups—informative, problem-solving, and brainstorming groups, at home or at work—as a member and as a leader.
- **Presentation or public speaking skills** will enable you to manage your fear and make it work for you, rather than against you. These skills will enable you to communicate information to small and large audiences and influence their attitudes and behaviors.

You'll learn these skills and reap the benefits as you develop facility in the varied forms of communication, to which we now turn.

FORMS OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION

You'll accomplish these objectives and acquire these skills as you engage in and master a variety of human communication forms. **Intrapersonal communication** is the communication you have with yourself—when you talk with, learn about, and judge yourself. You persuade yourself of this or that, reason about possible decisions to make, and rehearse messages that you plan to send to others. In intrapersonal communication you might, for example, wonder how you did in an interview and what you could have done differently. You might conclude you did a pretty good job but tell yourself you need to be more assertive when discussing salary.

Interpersonal communication occurs when you interact with a person with whom you have some kind of relationship; it can take place face-to-face as well as through electronic channels (e-mail or instant messaging, for example) or even in traditional letter writing. Perhaps you might e-mail your friends or family about your plans for the weekend, ask someone in class for a date, or confront a colleague's racist remarks at the water cooler. Through interpersonal communication you interact with others, learn about them and yourself, and reveal yourself to others. Whether with new acquaintances, old friends, lovers, family members, or colleagues at work, it's through interpersonal communication that you establish, maintain, sometimes destroy, and sometimes repair personal relationships.

Interviewing is a form of interpersonal communication that proceeds by question and answer. Through interviewing you learn about others and what they know, counsel or get counseling from others, and get or don't get the job you want. Today much interviewing (especially initial interviews) takes place through e-mail, phone conferencing, or video conferencing with Skype, for example.



VIEWPOINTS

Importance of Communication

Women often report that an essential quality—perhaps the most important quality—in a partner is the ability to communicate. And managers and employment interviewers routinely list communication skills among the most important job-related skills in a desirable employee. How important, compared to all the other factors you might take into consideration in choosing a partner or in succeeding at work, is the ability to communicate? What specific communication skills would you consider “extremely important” in a life partner?



"I'd like to see you do this online."

Small group communication or team communication is communication among groups of, say five to ten people and may take place face-to-face or, increasingly, in virtual space. Small group communication serves *relationship needs*—such as those for companionship, affection, or support—and *task needs*—such as balancing the family budget, electing a new chairperson, or designing a new ad campaign. Through small group communication you interact with others, solve problems, develop new ideas, and share knowledge and experiences.

Public communication is communication between a speaker and an audience. Audiences range in size from several people to hundreds, thousands, and even millions. Through public communication a speaker will inform and persuade you. And you, in turn, inform and persuade others—to act, to buy, or to think in a particular way. Much as you can address large audiences face-to-face, you also can address such audiences electronically. Through social networks, newsgroups, or blogs, for example, you can post your “speech” for anyone to read

and then read their reactions to your message. In addition, with the help of the more traditional mass media of radio and television, you can address audiences in the hundreds of millions as they sit alone or in small groups all over the world.

Computer-mediated communication is a general term that includes all forms of communication between people that take place through some kind of computer, whether it’s on your smartphone or via a standard Internet connection. Examples include e-mail, blogging, instant messaging, or posting or chatting on social network sites such as Facebook, Google+, or Twitter. Throughout this text, we’ll make frequent reference to the similarities and differences between face-to-face and computer-mediated communication.

Mass communication refers to communication from one source to many receivers who may be scattered throughout the world. Newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and film are the major mass media. Recently *media literacy*—the skills and competencies needed to become a wiser, more critical consumer—has become central to the study of human communication. Accordingly, the coverage of mass communication here is limited to media literacy—a topic covered in the chapter-opening photos, in frequent examples, illustrations, and exercises, and the inclusion of a variety of Media Literacy boxes at **MyCommunicationLab**.

This text focuses on all these forms of communication—and on you as both message sender and message receiver. It has two major purposes:

- To explain the concepts and principles, the theory and research in human communication, so that you’ll have a firm understanding of what communication is and how it works.
- To provide you with skills of human communication that will help you increase your communication competence and effectiveness in your personal and professional lives.



Read the “Media Literacy boxes” at **MyCommunicationLab**



Objectives Self-Check

- Can you identify the myths that can hinder the study of communication?
- Can you identify the wide variety of skills you’ll learn as you progress through this course?
- Can you identify the forms of human communication to be covered here?



For some advice for beginning college students, see “To Beginning Students” at tcbdevito.blogspot.com. What additional advice would you want?

Communication Models and Concepts

In early **models** (representations) or theories, the communication process was thought to be linear. According to this *linear* view, the speaker spoke and the listener listened. Communication was seen as proceeding in a relatively straight line. Speaking and listening were seen as taking place at different times; when you spoke, you didn’t listen, and when you listened, you didn’t speak (Figure 1.1).

A more satisfying view, the one held currently, sees communication as a transactional process in which each person serves as both speaker and listener, sending and receiving messages (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, 1977, 1978; Barnlund, 1970). In face-to-face communication, while you send messages you're also receiving messages from your own communications and from the reactions of the other person. This is also true in phone communication, in instant messaging, and in chatting. Other online communications, such as posting on Facebook or e-mail, more closely resemble the linear model of communication where sending and receiving occur at different times.

The transactional view also sees the elements of communication as interdependent (never independent). This means that each element exists in relation to the others. A change in any one element of the process produces changes in the other elements. For example, if you're having a meeting with a group of your coworkers and your boss enters the room, this change in "audience" will lead to other changes. Perhaps you'll change what you're saying or how you're saying it. Regardless of what change is introduced, other changes will occur as a result.

Communication occurs when you send or receive messages and when you assign meaning to another person's signals. All human communication occurs within a context, is transmitted via one or more channels, is distorted by noise, and has some effect. We can expand the basic transactional model of communication by adding these essential elements, as shown in Figure 1.2.

SOURCES–RECEIVERS

According to the transactional model, each person involved in communication is both a **source** (speaker) and a **receiver** (listener); hence the term *sources–receivers*. You send messages when you speak, write, gesture, or smile. You receive messages in listening, reading, seeing, smelling, and so on. At the same time that you send messages, you're also receiving messages: You're receiving your own messages (you hear yourself, feel your own movements, see many of your own gestures), and, at least in face-to-face communication, you're receiving the messages of the other person—visually, auditorily, or even through touch or smell. As you speak, you look at the person for responses—for approval, understanding, sympathy, agreement, and so on. As you decipher these nonverbal signals, you're performing receiver functions. When you write to or text someone with video; the situation is very similar to the face-to-face situation. Without video, you might visualize the responses you expect/want the person to give.

When you put your ideas into speech, you're putting them into a code; hence you're **encoding**. When you translate the sound waves (the speech signals) that impinge on your ears or read the words on a screen, into ideas, you take them out of the code they're in; hence you're **decoding**. Thus, speakers or writers are often referred to as **encoders**, and listeners or readers as **decoders**. The linked term *encoding–decoding* emphasizes the fact that you perform these functions simultaneously.

Usually, you encode an idea into a code that the other person understands—for example, English, Spanish, or Indonesian, depending on the shared knowledge that you and your listener possess. At times, however, you may want to exclude others by speaking in a language that only one of your listeners knows or by using jargon. The use of abbreviations and jargon in text messaging is another example of how people communicate in a code that only certain people will understand.

MESSAGES

Communication **messages** take many forms and are transmitted or received through one or more sensory organs or a combination of them. You communicate verbally (with words) and

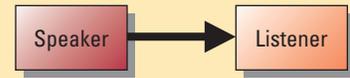


FIGURE 1.1

The Linear View of Human Communication

The speaker speaks and the listener listens.

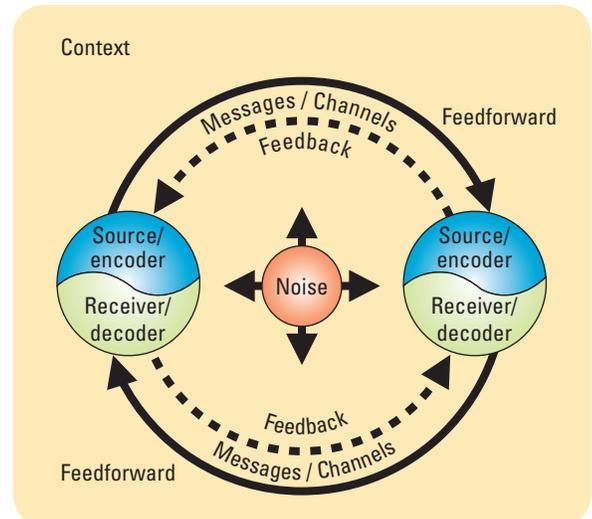


FIGURE 1.2

The Essentials of Human Communication

This is a general model of communication between two people and most accurately depicts communication as a transactional process. It puts into visual form the various elements of the communication process. How would you revise this model to depict small group interaction or public speaking?



Explore the Exercise
"Comparing Human
Communication" at
MyCommunicationLab

nonverbally (without words). Your meanings or intentions are conveyed with words (Chapter 4) and with the clothes you wear, the way you walk, and the way you smile (Chapter 5). Everything about you communicates a message.



Explore the **Exercise** “How to Give Feedforward” at **MyCommunicationLab**



Communication Choice Point

Giving Feedforward

The grades were just posted for a course, and you see that your dorm mate failed. You got an A. Your dorm mate asks you about the grades. You feel you want to preface your remarks. *What kind of feedforward might you give in this case?*

Feedforward Messages Feedforward is information you provide before sending your primary messages (Richards, 1951). It reveals something about the messages to come and includes, for example, the preface or table of contents of a book, the opening paragraph of a chapter, movie previews, magazine covers, and introductions in public speeches.

Feedforward may be verbal (“Wait until you hear this one”) or nonverbal (a prolonged pause or hands motioning for silence to signal that an important message is about to be spoken). Or, as is most often the case, it is some combination of verbal and nonverbal. Feedforward may refer to the content of the message to follow (“I’ll tell you exactly what they said to each other”) or to the form (“I won’t spare you the gory details”). In e-mail, feedforward is given in the header, where the name of the sender, the date, and the subject of the message are identified. Caller ID is also an example of feedforward.

Another type of feedforward is **phatic communication**—“small talk” that opens the way for “big talk.” It includes the “How are you?” and “Nice weather” greetings that are designed to maintain rapport and friendly relationships (Placencia, 2004; Burnard, 2003). Similarly, listeners’ short comments that are unrelated to the content of the conversation but indicate interest and attention also may be considered phatic communication (McCarthy, 2003).

Feedback Messages When you send a message—say, in speaking to another person—you also hear yourself. That is, you get **feedback** from your own messages; you hear what you say, you feel the way you move, you see what you write. In addition to this self-feedback, you also get feedback from others. This feedback can take many forms. A frown or a smile, a yea or a nay, a returned poke or a retweet, a pat on the back or a punch in the mouth are all types of feedback.

Feedback tells the speaker what effect he or she is having on listeners. On the basis of feedback, the speaker may adjust, modify, strengthen, deemphasize, or change the content or form of the messages. For example, if someone laughs at your joke (giving you positive feedback), it may encourage you to tell another one. If the feedback is negative—no laughing, just blank stares—then you may resist relaying another “humorous” story.

Metamessages A **metamessage** is a message that refers to another message; it is communication about communication. For example, remarks such as “This statement is false” or “Do you understand what I am trying to tell you?” refer to communication and are therefore “metacommunicational.”

Nonverbal behavior may also be metacommunicational. Obvious examples include crossing your fingers behind your back or winking when telling a lie. On a less obvious level, consider the blind date. As you say, “I had a really nice time,” your nonverbal messages—the lack of a smile, failure to maintain eye contact—metacommunicate and contradict the verbal “really nice time,” suggesting that you did not enjoy the evening. Nonverbal messages may also metacommunicate about other nonverbal messages. The individual who, on meeting a stranger, both smiles and extends a totally lifeless hand shows how one nonverbal behavior may contradict another.

Workplace Messages In workplace organizations messages are often classified in terms of their direction.



VIEWPOINTS

Feedback

Based on your own experiences, do you find that people who accurately read and respond to feedback are better liked than those who don’t read feedback as accurately? In what ways might the ability to give effective feedback influence the growth or deterioration of a relationship? Is there a relationship between the ability to read feedback and the ability to communicate information or to persuade an audience?

- **Upward communication** consists of messages sent from the lower levels of a hierarchy to the upper levels—for example, from line worker to manager, or faculty member to dean. This type of communication usually is concerned with job-related activities and problems; ideas for change and suggestions for improvement; and feelings about the organization, work, other workers, or similar issues.
- **Downward communication** consists of messages sent from the higher levels to the lower levels of the hierarchy—for example, messages sent by managers to workers or by deans to faculty members. Common forms of downward communication include orders; explanations of procedures, goals, and changes; and appraisals of workers.
- **Lateral communication** refers to messages between equals—manager-to-manager, worker-to-worker. Such messages may move within the same subdivision or department of the organization or across divisions. Lateral communication, for example, is the kind of communication that takes place between two history professors at Illinois State University, between a psychologist at Ohio State and a communicologist at Kent State, or between a bond trader and an equities trader at a brokerage house.
- **Grapevine communication** messages don't follow any of the formal, hierarchical lines of communication established in an organization; rather, they seem to have a life of their own. **Grapevine** messages concern job-related issues that you want to discuss in a more interpersonal setting—for example, organizational issues that have not yet been made public, the real relationship among the regional managers, or possible changes that are being considered but not yet finalized.



VIEWPOINTS

Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication

In face-to-face and in much online communication, messages are exchanged with virtually no delay; communication is synchronous. In other forms of communication—for example, snail or e-mail and blog posts—the messages may be exchanged with considerable delay; communication here is asynchronous. What differences does this lead to in the way you communicate in these various forms?

COMMUNICATION CONTEXT

Communication exists in a context that determines, to a large extent, the meaning of any verbal or nonverbal message. The same words or behaviors may have totally different meanings when they occur in different contexts. For example, the greeting “How are you?” means “Hello” to someone you pass regularly on the street but “Is your health improving?” to a friend in the hospital. A wink to an attractive person on a bus means something completely different from a wink that signifies a put-on or a lie. Divorced from the context, it's impossible to tell what meaning was intended from just examining the signals.

The context will also influence what you say and how you say it. You communicate differently depending on the specific context you're in. Contexts have at least four aspects: physical, cultural, social-psychological, and temporal or time.

- The **physical context** is the tangible or concrete environment, the room, park, or auditorium; you don't talk the same way at a noisy football game as you do at a quiet funeral.
- The **cultural context** involves the lifestyles, beliefs, values, behavior, and communication of a group; it is the rules of a group of people for considering something right or wrong.
- The **social-psychological context** has to do with the status relationships among speakers, the formality of the situation, the norms of a group or organization; you don't talk the same way in the cafeteria as you would at a formal dinner at your boss's house.



Communication Choice Point

Message Overload

Several relatives have developed chain e-mail lists and send you virtually everything they come upon as they surf the Internet. You need to stop this e-mail overload. But, most of all, you don't want to insult your relatives or make them feel guilty. *What are some of the things you might say? What are the advantages and disadvantages of saying nothing?*

- The **temporal context** is a message's position within a sequence of events; you don't talk the same way after someone tells you about the death of a close relative as you do after someone reveals they've won the lottery.

These four contexts interact—each influences and is influenced by the others. For example, arriving late for a date (temporal context) may lead to changes in the degree of friendliness (social-psychological context), which would depend on the cultures of you and your date (cultural context), and may lead to changes in where you go on the date (physical context).



Communication Choice Point

Channels

You want to ask someone for a date and are considering how you might go about this. *What are your choices among channels? Which channel would be the most effective? Which channel would provoke the least anxiety?*

CHANNEL

The communication **channel** is the vehicle or medium through which messages pass. Communication rarely takes place over only one channel. Rather, two, three, or four channels may be used simultaneously. In face-to-face conversations, for example, you speak and listen (vocal channel), but you also gesture and receive signals visually (visual channel). You also emit and smell odors (olfactory channel) and often touch one another; this tactile channel, too, is communication.

Another way to classify channels is by the means of communication. Thus, face-to-face contact, telephones, e-mail, movies, television, smoke signals, and telegraph all are types of channels.

NOISE

Noise is anything that interferes with your receiving a message. At one extreme, noise may prevent a message from getting from source to receiver. A roaring noise or line static can prevent entire messages from getting through to your phone receiver. At the other extreme, with virtually no noise interference, the message of the source and the message received are almost identical. Most often, however, noise distorts some portion of the message a source sends as it travels to a receiver. Just as messages may be auditory or visual, noise comes in both auditory and visual forms. Four types of noise are especially relevant:

- **Physical noise** is interference that is external to both speaker and listener; it interferes with the physical transmission of the signal or message and would include the screeching of passing cars, the hum of a computer, sunglasses, blurred type or fonts that are too small or difficult to read, misspellings and poor grammar, and popup ads.
- **Physiological noise** is created by barriers within the sender or receiver and would include visual impairments, hearing loss, articulation problems, and memory loss.
- **Psychological noise** refers to mental interference in the speaker or listener and includes preconceived ideas, wandering thoughts, biases and prejudices, close-mindedness, and extreme emotionalism. You're likely to run into psychological noise when you talk with someone who is close-minded or who refuses to listen to anything he or she doesn't already believe.
- **Semantic noise** is interference that occurs when the speaker and listener have different meaning systems; it would include language or dialectical differences, the use of jargon or overly complex terms, and ambiguous or overly abstract terms whose meanings can be easily misinterpreted. You see this type of noise regularly in the medical doctor who uses "medicalese" without explanation or in the insurance salesperson who speaks in the jargon of the insurance industry.

As you can see from these examples, noise is anything that distorts your receiving the messages of others or their receiving your messages.

A useful concept in understanding noise and its importance in communication is **signal-to-noise ratio**. In this term the word *signal* refers to information that you'd find useful, and *noise* refers to information that is useless (to you). So, for example, a post or feed that contains lots of useful information is high on signal and low on noise; one that contains lots of useless information is high on noise and low on signal.



Noise of a somewhat different type is discussed in "The Chain Letter as Dysfunctional Communication" at tcbdevito.blogspot.com. What's your opinion of the chain letter? Are there some chain letters that you view more positively than others?

All communications contain noise. Noise can't be totally eliminated, but its effects can be reduced. Making your language more precise, sharpening your skills for sending and receiving nonverbal messages, adjusting your camera for greater clarity, and improving your listening and feedback skills are some ways to combat the influence of noise.

EFFECTS

Communication always has some **effect** on those involved in the communication act. For every communication act, there is some consequence. For example, you may gain knowledge or learn how to analyze, synthesize, or evaluate something. These are intellectual or cognitive effects. You may acquire new feelings, attitudes, or beliefs or change existing ones (affective effects). You may learn new bodily movements, such as how to throw a curve ball, paint a picture, give a compliment, or express surprise (psychomotor effects).



Communication Choice Point

Negative Communication Effects

You post a really negative remark on your friend's Facebook wall. The next day you realize you shouldn't have been so negative. You want to remain friends; you need to say something. *What are your options for communicating your feelings? What would you do?*



Video Choice Point

Ryan Asks for a Recommendation

Ryan, a communication major, needs a letter of recommendation for a summer internship. He wants to ask Professor Starck, a popular instructor who he previously had in class, for a recommendation. But, he isn't sure how to approach her. He considers the effect of the various elements of communication—including context, feedback, feedforward, noise, and channel—on the outcome as he contemplates composing an effective message. In this video you'll see Ryan try three different approaches with varying effects. See how his choices play out in the video, "Ryan Asks for a Recommendation".



Watch the Video "Ryan Asks for a Recommendation" at [MyCommunicationLab](#)



Objectives Self-Check

- Can you draw/diagram a model of communication that contains the elements of source-receiver, messages, context, channel, noise, and effects and that illustrates how these are related to each other? Can you define each of these elements?

Principles of Communication

Several principles are essential to an understanding of human communication in all its forms. These principles, as you'll see throughout the text, also have numerous practical implications to help you increase your own communication effectiveness. A summary of these principles appears in Table 1.1.



Watch the Video "Going Up" at [MyCommunicationLab](#)

COMMUNICATION IS PURPOSEFUL

You communicate for a purpose; some motivation leads you to communicate. When you speak or write, you're trying to send some message and to accomplish some goal. Although different cultures emphasize different purposes and motives (Rubin, Fernandez-Collado, & Hernandez-Sampieri, 1992), five general purposes seem relatively common to most, if not all, forms of communication:

- **to learn:** to acquire knowledge of others, the world, and yourself
- **to relate:** to form relationships with others, to interact with others as individuals
- **to help:** to assist others by listening, offering solutions
- **to influence:** to strengthen or change the attitudes or behaviors of others
- **to play:** to enjoy the experience of the moment

TABLE 1.1 A Summary of Some Principles of Human Communication

Here, in brief, are the seven principles of human communication, their basic ideas and implications.

Principles	Basic Ideas	Skill Implications
<i>Communication is purposeful.</i>	Communication may serve a variety of purposes— for example, to learn, to relate, to help, to influence, to play.	Use your purposes to guide your verbal and nonverbal messages. Identify the purposes in the messages of others.
<i>Communication involves choices.</i>	In all communication situations you're confronted with choices as to what to say and how you say it. Communication training enlarges the number of choices.	Realize that you have choices in your communications and you don't have to say the first thing that comes into your head.
<i>Communication is ambiguous.</i>	All messages and all relationships are potentially ambiguous.	Use clear and specific terms, ask if you're being understood, and paraphrase complex ideas.
<i>Communication involves content and relationship dimensions.</i>	Messages may refer to the real world, to something external to both speaker and listener (the content) <i>and</i> to the relationships between the parties.	Distinguish between content and relationship messages and deal with relationship issues as relationship issues.
<i>Communication has a power dimension.</i>	Through verbal and nonverbal communication, you establish your power.	Follow the guidelines for effective ethical communication.
<i>Communication is punctuated.</i>	Communication events are continuous transactions, punctuated into causes and effects for convenience.	See alternative punctuations when trying to understand another's point of view.
<i>Communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable.</i>	Messages are (almost) always being sent, can't be uncommunicated, and are always unique, one-time occurrences.	Be careful of what you say; you won't be able to take it back.

In research on the motivations/purposes for using social networking sites, it's the relationship purpose that dominates. One research study, for example, finds the following motivations/purposes, in order of frequency mentioned: Staying in touch with friends, staying in touch with family, connecting with friends with whom you've lost contact, connecting with those who share your interests, making new friends, reading comments by celebrities, and finding romantic partners (Smith, 2011). As you can see the reasons are mostly to relate but the other purposes are likely served in the process.

Popular belief and research findings both agree that men and women use communication for different purposes. Generally, men seem to communicate more for information and women more for relationship purposes (Gamble & Gamble, 2003; Stewart, Cooper, & Stewart, 2003; Helgeson, 2009). Gender differences also occur in electronic communication. For example, women chat more for relationship reasons; men chat more to play and to relax (Leung, 2001).

COMMUNICATION INVOLVES CHOICES

Throughout your communication life and in each communication interaction you're presented with **choice points**—moments when you have to make a choice as to whom you communicate with, what you say, what you don't say, how you phrase what you want to say, and so on. This course and this text aim to give you reasons (grounded in communication theory and research discussed throughout the text) for the varied choices you'll be called upon to make in your communication interactions. The course also aims to give you the skills you'll need to execute these well-reasoned choices.

You can look at the process of choice in terms of educational theorist John Dewey's (1910) steps in reflective thinking, a model used for explaining small group problem solving and conflict resolution. It can also be used to explain the notion of choice in five steps.

- **Step 1: The problem.** View a communication interaction as a problem to be resolved, as a situation to be addressed. Here you try to understand the nature of the communication situation and the elements involved. Let's say that your "problem" is that you said something you shouldn't have and it's created a problem between you and your friend, romantic partner, or family member. You need to resolve this problem.
- **Step 2: The criteria.** Ask yourself what your specific communication goal is. What do you want your message to accomplish? For example, you want to admit your mistake, apologize, and be forgiven.
- **Step 3: The possible solutions.** Ask yourself what are some of your communication choices. What are some of the messages you might communicate in your apology?
- **Step 4: The analysis.** Identify the advantages and disadvantages of each communication choice.
- **Step 5: The selection and execution.** Communicate your best choice, the one that you hope will resolve the problem and get you forgiveness.

As a student of communication, you would later reflect on this communication situation and identify what you learned, what you did well, and what you could have done more effectively.

COMMUNICATION IS AMBIGUOUS

Ambiguity is the condition in which something can be interpreted in more than one way. The first type, *language ambiguity*, is created by words that can be interpreted differently. Informal time terms offer good examples; *soon*, *right away*, *in a minute*, *early*, *late*, and similar terms can be understood differently by different people. The terms are ambiguous. A more interesting type of ambiguity is grammatical ambiguity. You can get a feel for this type of ambiguity by trying to paraphrase—rephrase in your own words—the following sentences:

- What has the cat in its paws?
- Flying planes can be dangerous.
- They are frying chickens.

Each of these ambiguous sentences can be interpreted and paraphrased in at least two different ways:

- What does the cat have in its paws? What monster has the cat in its paws?
- To fly planes is dangerous. Planes that fly can be dangerous.
- Those people are frying chickens. Those chickens are for frying.

Although these examples are particularly striking—and are the work of linguists who analyze language—some degree of ambiguity exists in all communication. When you express an idea, you never communicate your meaning exactly and totally; rather, you communicate your meaning with some reasonable accuracy—enough to give the other person a reasonably clear idea of what you mean.

The second type of ambiguity is *relationship ambiguity*. All relationships are ambiguous to some extent. Consider your own close relationships and ask yourself the following questions. Answer using a six-point scale on which 1 = completely or almost completely uncertain, and 6 = completely or almost completely certain. How certain are you about:

1. What can you say or not say to each other in this relationship?
2. Do you and your partner feel the same way about each other?
3. How would you and your partner describe this relationship?
4. How do you see the future of this relationship?

You probably were not able to respond with 6s for all four questions, and it is equally likely that your relationship partner would not respond with all 6s to these questions, adapted from a relationship uncertainty scale (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999).



As you think about making choices, take a look at "Satisficing: A Note on Making Choices" at tcbdevito.blogspot.com.



Communication Choice Point

Relationship Ambiguity

You've been dating Jessie on and off for the past six months. Today Jessie asks you to come to dinner and meet the parents. You're not sure what this means, what message Jessie's trying to send. *What options do you have for disambiguating this dinner invitation message? What would you say?*

You can look at the skills of human communication presented throughout this text as a means for appropriately reducing ambiguity and making the meanings you send and the meanings you receive as unambiguous as possible.

COMMUNICATION INVOLVES CONTENT AND RELATIONSHIP DIMENSIONS

Communication exists on at least two levels: a message referring to something external to both speaker and listener (e.g., the weather) or to the relationship between speaker and listener (e.g., who is in charge). These two aspects are referred to as **content and relationship dimensions** of communication (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). In the cartoon shown here, the father is explicitly teaching his son the difference between content and relationship messages. In real life this distinction is rarely discussed (outside of textbooks and counseling sessions).

Some research shows that women send more **relationship messages** than men; they talk more about relationships in general and about the present relationship in particular. Men engage in more content talk; they talk more about things external to the relationship (Wood, 1994; Pearson, West, & Turner, 1995; Helgeson, 2009).

Problems often result from a failure to distinguish between the content and the relationship levels of communication. Consider a couple, Pat and Chris. Pat made plans to attend a rally with friends during the weekend without first asking Chris, and an argument has ensued. Both would probably have agreed that attending the rally was the right choice to make. Thus, the argument is not centered on the content level. The argument, instead, centers on the relationship level. Chris expected to be consulted about plans for the weekend. Pat, in not doing so, rejected this definition of the relationship.



"It's not about the story. It's about Daddy taking time out of his busy day to read you the story."

© Peter C. Vey/Condé Nast Publications/www.cartoonbank.com.

COMMUNICATION HAS A POWER DIMENSION

Power refers to your ability to influence or control the behaviors of another person. Your power influences the way you communicate, and the way you communicate influences the power you wield. Research has identified six types of power: legitimate, referent, reward, coercive, expert, and information or persuasion (French & Raven, 1968; Raven, Centers, & Rodrigues, 1975). Before reading about these types of power, take the accompanying self-test; it will help personalize the material you'll read about.



SKILL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

Content and relationship messages serve different communication functions. Being able to distinguish between them is a prerequisite to using and responding to them effectively.

Communicating Content and Relationship Messages

How would you communicate both the content and the relationship messages in the following situations?

1. After a date that you didn't enjoy and don't want to repeat ever again, you want to express your sincere thanks; but you don't want to be misinterpreted as communicating any indication that you would go on another date with this person.
2. You're tutoring a high school freshman in algebra, but your tutee is really terrible and isn't paying attention or doing the homework you assign. You need to change this behavior and motivate a great change, yet at the same time you don't want to discourage or demoralize the young student.
3. You're interested in dating a friend on Facebook who also attends the college you do and with whom you've been chatting for a few weeks. But you don't know if the feeling is mutual. You want to ask for the date but to do so in a way that, if you're turned down, you won't be horribly embarrassed.

TEST YOURSELF



How Powerful Are You?

For each statement, indicate which of the following descriptions is most appropriate, using the scale below.

1 = true of 20 percent or fewer of the people I know; **2** = true of about 21 to 40 percent of the people I know; **3** = true of about 41 to 60 percent of the people I know; **4** = true of about 61 to 80 percent of the people I know; and **5** = true of 81 percent or more of the people I know.

- 1 My position is such that I often have to tell others what to do. For example, a mother's position demands that she tell her children what to do, a manager's position demands that he or she tell employees what to do, and so on.
- 2 People wish to be like me or identified with me. For example, high school football players may admire the former professional football player who is now their coach and want to be like him.
- 3 People see me as having the ability to give them what they want. For example, employers have the ability to give their employees increased pay, longer vacations, or improved working conditions.
- 4 People see me as having the ability to administer punishment or to withhold things they want. For example, employers have the ability to reduce voluntary overtime, shorten vacation time, or fail to improve working conditions.
- 5 Other people realize that I have expertise in certain areas of knowledge. For example, a doctor has expertise in medicine and so others turn to the doctor to tell them what to do. Someone knowledgeable about computers similarly possesses expertise.
- 6 Other people realize that I possess the communication ability to present an argument logically and persuasively.

HOW DID YOU DO? These statements refer to the six major types of power, as described in the text. Low scores (1s and 2s) indicate your belief that you possess little of these particular types of power, and high scores (4s and 5s) indicate your belief that you possess a great deal of these particular types of power.

WHAT WILL YOU DO? How satisfied are you with your level of power? If you're not satisfied, what might you do about it? A good starting place, of course, is to learn the skills of communication—interpersonal, small group, and public speaking—discussed in this text. Consider the kinds of communication patterns that would help you communicate power and exert influence in group situations.

- You hold **legitimate power** when others believe you have a right—by virtue of your position—to influence or control others' behaviors. For example, as an employer, judge, manager, or police officer, you'd have legitimate power by virtue of your role.
- You have **referent power** when others wish to be like you. Referent power holders often are attractive, have considerable prestige, and are well liked and well respected. For example, you may have referent power over a younger brother because he wants to be like you.
- You have **reward power** when you control the rewards that others want. Rewards may be material (money, promotion, jewelry) or social (love, friendship, respect). For example, teachers have reward power over students because they control grades, letters of recommendation, and social approval.
- You have **coercive power** when you have the ability to administer punishments to or remove rewards from others if they do not do as you wish. Usually, people who have reward power also have coercive power. For example, teachers may give poor grades or withhold recommendations. But be careful: Coercive power may reduce your other power bases. It can have a negative impact when used, for example, by supervisors on subordinates in business (Richmond et al., 1984).
- You have **expert power** when others see you as having expertise or special knowledge. Your expert power increases when you're perceived as being unbiased and as having nothing personally to gain from exerting this power. For example, judges have expert power in legal matters and doctors have expert power in medical matters.



Communication Choice Point

Unwanted Talk

Your supervisor at work continually talks about sex. You fear your lack of reaction has been interpreted as a sign of approval. You need to change that but at the same time not alienate the person who can fire you. *What are some of things you might do to stop this unwanted talk?*

- You have **information power**—also called “persuasion power”—when others see you as having the ability to communicate logically and persuasively. For example, researchers and scientists may acquire information power because people perceive them as informed and critical thinkers.



Communication Choice Point Establishing Power

As a new teacher, you want to establish your power as soon as possible. *What options do you have for communicating your power? What are some of the things you would say if you were a fourth-grade teacher? If you were a college professor?*

The power you wield is not static; it can be increased or decreased depending on what you do and don't do. For example, you might increase your reward power by gaining wealth and using it to exert influence, or you might increase your persuasive power by mastering the principles of public speaking.

You can also decrease or lose power. Probably the most common way to lose power is by unsuccessfully trying to control another person's behavior. For example, if you threaten someone with punishment and then fail to carry out your threat, you'll most likely lose power. Another way to lose power is to allow others to control you or to take unfair advantage of you. When you don't confront these power tactics of others, you lose power.

COMMUNICATION IS PUNCTUATED

Communication events are continuous transactions that have no clear-cut beginning or ending. As a participant in or an observer of communication, you divide this continuous, circular process into causes and effects, or stimuli and responses. The **punctuation of communication** is the segmenting of the continuous stream of communication into smaller pieces (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Some of these pieces you label causes (or stimuli) and others effects (or responses).

Consider this example: The manager of a local supermarket lacks interest in the employees, seldom offering any suggestions for improvement or any praise for jobs well done. The employees are apathetic and morale is low. Each action (the manager's lack of involvement and the employees' low morale) stimulates the other. Each serves as the stimulus for the other but there is no identifiable initial starting point. Each event may be seen as a stimulus or as a response.

To understand what the other person in an interaction means from his or her point of view, try to see the sequence of events as punctuated by the other person. The manager, for example, needs to see the problem from the point of view of the employees; and the employees need to see it from the viewpoint of the manager. Further, recognize that neither person's punctuation reflects what exists in reality. Rather, it reflects the subjective and fallible perception of each individual (the other person as well as you).



SKILL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

Writing Your Social Network Profile

Examine your own social network profile (or that of a friend) in terms of the principles of communication discussed in this chapter:

1. What purposes does your profile serve? In what ways might it serve the five purposes of communication identified here (to learn, relate, influence, play, and help)?
2. In what way is your profile page a package of signals? In what ways do the varied words and pictures combine to communicate meaning?
3. Can you identify and distinguish between content from relational messages?
4. In what ways, if any, have you adjusted your profile as a response to the ways in which others have fashioned their profiles?
5. In what ways does your profile exhibit power? In what ways, if any, have you incorporated into your profile the six types of power discussed in this chapter (legitimate, referent, reward, coercive, expert, or information)?
6. What messages on your profile are ambiguous? Bumper stickers and photos should provide a useful starting point.
7. What are the implications of inevitability, irreversibility, and unrepeatability for publishing a profile on and communicating via social network sites?

Heightened awareness of how messages help create meanings should increase your awareness of the varied choices you have for communicating and ultimately your own communication effectiveness.

COMMUNICATION IS INEVITABLE, IRREVERSIBLE, AND UNREPEATABLE

Inevitability Communication is inevitable; that is, in interactional situations it is always taking place, even when a person may not intend or want to communicate. To understand the **inevitability** of communication, think about a student sitting in the back of a classroom with an expressionless face, perhaps staring out the window. Although the student might claim not to be communicating with the instructor, the instructor may derive a variety of messages from this behavior. Perhaps the instructor assumes that the student lacks interest, is bored, or is worried about something. In any event, the teacher is receiving messages even though the student may not intentionally be sending any (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; Motley, 1990a, 1990b; Bavelas, 1990). This does not mean that all behavior is communication. For instance, if the student looked out the window and the teacher didn't notice, no communication would have taken place. The two people must be in an interactional situation and the behavior must be perceived for the principle of inevitability to operate.

Notice, too, that when you're in an interactional situation, you cannot *not* respond to the messages of others. For example, if you notice someone winking at you, you must respond in some way. Even if you don't respond actively or openly, your lack of response is itself a response: It communicates.

Irreversibility Another all-important attribute of communication is its **irreversibility**. Once you say something or click "send" on your e-mail, you cannot uncommunicate the message. You can, of course, try to reduce its effects. You can say, for example, "I really didn't mean what I said." But regardless of how hard you try to negate or reduce the effects of a message, the message itself, once it has been received, cannot be taken back. In a public speaking situation in which the speech is recorded or broadcast, inappropriate messages may have national or even international effects. Here, attempts to reverse what someone has said (e.g., efforts to offer clarification) often have the effect of further publicizing the original statement.

In face-to-face communication, the actual signals (nonverbal messages and sound waves in the air) are evanescent; they fade almost as they are uttered. Some written messages, especially computer-mediated messages (such as those sent through e-mail or posted on social network sites) are unerasable. E-mails among employees in large corporations or even at colleges are often stored on disk or tape and may not be considered private by managers and administrators (Sethna, Barnes, Brust, & Kaye, 1999). Much litigation has involved evidence of racist or sexist e-mails that senders thought had been erased but were not. E-mails and entire hard drives are finding their way into divorce proceedings. As a result of the permanency of computer-mediated communication, you may wish to be especially cautious in these messages.

In all forms of communication, because of irreversibility (and unerasability), be careful not to say things you may be sorry for later, especially in conflict situations, when tempers run high. Commitment messages—"I love you" messages and their variants—also need to be monitored. Messages that you considered private but that might be interpreted as sexist, racist, or homophobic may later be retrieved by others and create all sorts of problems for you and your organization. Interestingly enough, only 55 percent of online teens say they do not post content that might reflect negatively on them in the future (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Cickuhr, & Rainie, 2011). In group and public communication situations, when the messages are received by many people, it's especially crucial to recognize the irreversibility of communication.

Unrepeatability Finally, communication is unrepeatable. A communication act can never be duplicated. The reason is simple: Everyone and everything is constantly changing. As a result, you can never recapture the exact same situation, frame of mind, or relationship dynamics that defined a previous communication act. For example, you can never repeat meeting someone for the first time, comforting a grieving friend, leading a small group for the first time, or giving a public speech. You can never replace an initial impression; you can only try to counteract this initial (and perhaps negative) impression by making subsequent impressions more positive.



See "social media warnings" and "Social Networking and Getting a Job" at tcbdevito.blogspot.com for some added insights into the dangers of posting inappropriate photos and messages on your social media site. Do you think this concern is warranted? Overblown?



Communication Choice Point

The Irreversibility of Communication

You refer to your best friend's current romantic partner with the name of an ex-partner. From both their expressions you can tell your friend never mentioned the ex. You need to get your friend out of the trouble you just created. *What are some of the things you might say? What would you be sure not to say?*



For an application of some of these principles to a letter to Dear Abby, see "It's about communication, Abby" at tcbdevito.blogspot.com. How would you have answered this writer's letter?



Objectives Self-Check

- Can you paraphrase the seven principles of human communication and their implications for human interaction (it is purposeful; involves choices; is ambiguous; involves content and relationship dimensions; involves power; is punctuated; and is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable)?



Explore the Exercise
“From Culture to Gender” at
MyCommunicationLab

Culture and Human Communication

Culture consists of the beliefs, ways of behaving, and artifacts of a group. By definition, culture is transmitted through communication and learning rather than through genes.

A walk through any large city, many small towns, or just about any college campus will convince you that the United States is a collection of many different cultures. These cultures coexist somewhat separately but all influence one another. This coexistence has led some researchers to refer to these cultures as *cocultures* (Shuter, 1990; Samovar & Porter, 1991; Jandt, 2010).

Gender is considered a cultural variable largely because cultures teach boys and girls different attitudes, beliefs, values, and ways of communicating and relating to one another. This means that you act like a man or a woman in part because of what your culture has taught you about how men and women should act. This is not to deny that biological differences also play a role in the differences between male and female behavior. In fact, research continues to uncover the biological roots of behavior we once thought was entirely learned—acting happy or shy, for example (McCroskey, 1997).

Yet we’re living in a time of changing gender roles. Many men, for example, are doing more housekeeping chores and caring for their children. More obvious perhaps is that women are becoming more visible in career fields once occupied exclusively by men—politics, law enforcement, the military, and the clergy are just some examples. And, of course, women are increasingly present in the corporate executive ranks; the glass ceiling may not have disappeared, but it has cracked.

Because your communication is heavily influenced by the culture in which you were raised, culture is highly relevant to communication, and a cultural perspective serves numerous important purposes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

Culture is important for a variety of reasons. Here are a few:

- **Demographic changes:** Whereas at one time the United States was a country largely populated by Europeans, it’s now greatly influenced by the enormous number of new citizens from Latin America, South America, Africa, and Asia. With these changes have come different customs and the need to understand and adapt to new ways of looking at communication.
- **Sensitivity to cultural differences:** As a people, we’ve become increasingly sensitive to cultural differences. U.S. society has moved from an *assimilationist perspective* (the idea that people should leave their native culture behind and adapt to their new culture) to a view that values *cultural diversity* (people should retain their native cultural ways). At the same time, the ability to interact effectively with members of other cultures often translates into financial gain and increased employment opportunities and advancement prospects.
- **Economic interdependence:** Today most countries are economically dependent on one another. Our economic lives depend on our ability to communicate effectively across cultures. Similarly, our political well-being depends in great part on that of other cultures. Political unrest or financial problems in any part of the world—Africa, Europe, or the Middle East, to take a few examples—affects our own security. Intercultural communication and understanding now seem more crucial than ever.
- **Communication technology:** Technology has made intercultural interaction easy, practical, and inevitable. It’s common to have social network friends from different cultures, and these relationships require a new way of looking at communication and culture.
- **Culture-specific nature of communication:** Still another reason culture is so important is that communication competence is culture specific. As we’ll see throughout this chapter, what proves effective in one culture may prove ineffective (even offensive) in another.



Explore the Exercise
“Cultural Beliefs” at
MyCommunicationLab

THE DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

Because of its importance in all forms of human communication, culture is given a prominent place in this text; and theories and research findings that bear on culture and communication are discussed throughout. Prominent among these discussions are the seven major dimensions of culture, which we briefly preview here:

- **Uncertainty avoidance:** The degree to which a culture values predictability. In high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures, predictability and order are extremely important; in low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures, risk-taking and ambiguity are tolerated more easily.
- **Masculinity–femininity:** The extent to which cultures embrace traditionally masculine characteristics, such as ambition and assertiveness, or embrace traditionally feminine characteristics, such as caring and nurturing others.
- **Power distance:** The way power is distributed throughout the society. In high-power-distance cultures, there is a great power difference between those in authority and others. In low-power-distance cultures, power is distributed more evenly.
- **Individualism–collectivism:** A culture’s emphasis on the importance of the individual or of the group. Individualist cultures value qualities such as self-reliance, independence, and individual achievement; collectivist cultures emphasize social bonds, the primacy of the group, and conformity to the larger social group.
- **High and low context:** The extent to which information is seen as embedded in the context or tacitly known among members. In high-context cultures information is part of the context and does not have to be verbalized explicitly. In low-context cultures information is made explicit and little is taken for granted.
- **Indulgence and restraint:** The relative emphasis a culture places on the gratification of desires, on having fun, and enjoying life (indulgent cultures) as opposed to cultures which emphasize the curbing of these desires (restraint cultures).
- **Long- and short-term orientation:** The degree to which a culture teaches an orientation that promotes the importance of future rewards (long-term orientation) versus cultures that emphasize the importance of immediate rewards. These cultures also differ in their view of the workplace. Organizations in long-term-oriented cultures look to profits in the future. Managers or owners and workers in such cultures share the same values and work together to achieve a common good. Organizations in short-term-oriented cultures, on the other hand, look to more immediate rewards. Managers and workers are very different in their thinking and in their attitudes about work. Table 1.2 presents the differing values of the workplace selected by Asian and American executives.

TABLE 1.2 Values of the Workplace

Asian (long-term culture) and American (short-term culture) executives were asked to rank those values they considered most important in the workplace. The top six responses are presented here (in order of perceived importance) and show a dramatic difference between the two cultural groups (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Notice that “hard work” makes both lists but in very different positions.

Values Selected by Asian (Long-Term Orientation) Executives	Values Selected by American (Short-Term Orientation) Executives
Hard work	Freedom of expression
Respect for learning	Personal freedom
Honesty	Self-reliance
Openness to new ideas	Individual rights
Accountability	Hard work
Self-discipline	Personal achievement



Watch the Video
“That’s So Rude” at
MyCommunicationLab



VIEWPOINTS

Campus Culture

How would you describe the culture of your campus?
How would you describe the level of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity on your campus?

THE AIM OF A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Because culture permeates all forms of communication, and because what messages are effective in one culture may prove totally ineffective in another culture, it's necessary to understand cultural influences if you're to understand how communication works and master its skills. As illustrated throughout this text, culture influences communications of all types (Moon, 1996). It influences what you say to yourself and how you talk with friends, lovers, and family in everyday conversation. It influences how you interact in groups and how much importance you place on the group versus the individual. It influences the topics you talk about and the strategies you use in communicating information or in persuading.

Cultural differences exist across the communication spectrum—from the way you use eye contact to the way you develop or dissolve a relationship (Chang & Holt, 1996). But these differences should not blind you to the great number of similarities among even the most widely separated cultures. Close interpersonal relationships, for example, are common in all cultures, although they may be entered into for very different reasons by members of different cultures. Further, when reading about cultural differences, remember that they are usually matters of degree. For example, most cultures value honesty, but not all value it to the same extent. The advances in media and technology and the widespread use of the Internet, among other factors, are influencing cultures and cultural change and are perhaps homogenizing cultures, lessening intercultural differences, and increasing similarities. They're also Americanizing various cultures—because the dominant values and customs evidenced in the media and on the Internet are in large part American.

This text's emphasis on cultural understanding does not imply that you should accept all cultural practices or that all cultural practices must be evaluated as equally good (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). For example, cockfighting, foxhunting, and bullfighting are parts of the cultures of some Latin American countries, England, and Spain, respectively; but you need not find these activities acceptable or equal to cultural practices in which animals are treated kindly. Similarly, you can reject your own culture's values and beliefs; its religion or political system; or its attitudes toward the homeless, the disabled, or the culturally different. Of course, going against your culture's traditions and values is often very difficult. Still, it's important to realize that culture *influences* but does not *determine* your values or behavior. Often, factors such as personality (your degree of assertiveness, extroversion, or optimism, for example) will prove more influential than culture (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996).

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ETHNOCENTRISM

As you learn your culture's ways, you develop an **ethnic identity**—for example, you self-identity as a member of the group, you embrace (largely) the attitudes and beliefs of the group, and behave as a member of the group (perhaps celebrating ethnic holidays or preparing ethnic foods).

A healthy ethnic identity is generally regarded as a positive trait. It helps to preserve the ethnic culture, build group cohesiveness, and enable it to make its unique contributions to the culture as a whole. On the other hand, **ethnocentrism** is an extreme ethnic identity; it's the tendency to see others and their behaviors through your own cultural filters, often as distortions of your own behaviors. It's the tendency to evaluate the values, beliefs, and behaviors of your own culture as superior and as more positive, logical, and natural than those of other cultures. Although ethnocentrism may give you pride in your own culture and its achievements and encourage you to sacrifice for the culture, it also may lead you to see other cultures as inferior and may make you unwilling to profit from the contributions of other cultures. For example, there's a "substantial relationship" between ethnocentrism and homophobia (Wrench & McCroskey, 2003).



Explore the **Exercise**
"Cultural Identifiers" at
MyCommunicationLab

TABLE 1.3 The Ethnocentrism Continuum

This table summarizes some of the interconnections between ethnocentrism and communication. Five degrees of ethnocentrism are identified; in reality, there are as many degrees as there are people. The “communication distances” are general terms that highlight the attitude that dominates that level of ethnocentrism. Under “communications” are some of the major ways people might interact given their particular degree of ethnocentrism. Can you identify your own ethnocentrism in this table? For example, are there groups to which you have low ethnocentrism? Middle? High? What accounts for these differences? This table draws on the work of several intercultural researchers (Lukens, 1978; Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Gudykunst, 1991).

Degree of Ethnocentrism	Communication Distance	Communications
Low	Equality	You treat others as equals; you view different customs and ways of behaving as equal to your own.
↑	Sensitivity	You want to decrease the distance between yourself and others.
	Indifference	You lack concern for others; you prefer to interact in a world of similar others.
	Avoidance	You avoid and limit interactions, especially intimate communication with intercultural different others.
High	Disparagement	You engage in hostile behavior and belittle others; you view different cultures and ways of behaving as inferior to your own.

Ethnocentrism exists on a continuum (Table 1.3). People are not either ethnocentric or non-ethnocentric; most are somewhere between these polar opposites. And, of course, your degree of ethnocentrism often varies depending on the group on which you focus. For example, if you're Greek American, you may have a low degree of ethnocentrism when dealing with Italian Americans but a high degree when dealing with Turkish Americans or Japanese Americans. Your degree of ethnocentrism will influence your communication in all its forms, as we'll see throughout this text.



Objectives Self-Check

- Can you explain the role of culture in human communication and the seven ways in which cultures different from one another (individualist-collectivist, high and low context, high and low power distance, masculine and feminine, high and low tolerance for ambiguity, long- and short-term orientation, and indulgence and restraint)?
- Can you define *ethnic identity* and *ethnocentrism*?

Communication Competence

Communication competence refers to (1) your knowledge and understanding of how communication works and (2) your ability to use communication effectively (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989, 2002). Your understanding of communication would include a knowledge of the elements involved in communication, how these elements interact, and how each communication situation is both different from and similar to other situations. Your knowledge would also include an understanding of the choices you have for communicating in any given situation.

Using communication effectively would involve your ability to select and implement the best choices for communicating, and to read and adjust to the ongoing feedback that you receive from your own messages and that guide the choices you make in selecting future messages.

The more you know about communication, the more choices you'll have available for your day-to-day interactions. It's like learning vocabulary. The more vocabulary you know, the more choices you have to express yourself. In a similar way, the aim of this text is to increase your communicative competence and thus to give you a broad range of options to use in your own communications.

Let's spell out the nature of communication competence in more detail by discussing the major themes of competence that contemporary research and theory identify and that are highlighted in this text.



For a brief list of the characteristics of success, see “Communication and Success” at tcbdevito.blogspot.com.

THE COMPETENT COMMUNICATOR THINKS CRITICALLY AND MINDFULLY

An essential part of communication skill is the ability to think critically about the communication situations you face and the options for communicating that you have available; this is crucial to your success and effectiveness.

Without critical thinking there can be no competent exchange of ideas. Critical thinking is logical thinking; it's thinking that is well-reasoned, unbiased, and clear. It involves thinking intelligently, carefully, and with as much clarity as possible. And, not surprisingly, critical thinking is one of the stepping stones to effective management (Miller, 1997).

A special kind of critical thinking is **mindfulness**—a state of awareness in which you're conscious of your reasons for thinking or behaving. In its opposite, **mindlessness**, you lack conscious awareness of what or how you're thinking (Langer, 1989). To apply communication skills effectively in conversation, you need to be mindful of the unique communication situation you're in, of your available communication options, and of the reasons why one option is likely to be better than the others (Elmes & Gemmill, 1990; Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000).

As you progress through your study of human communication, actively increase your own mindfulness (Langer, 1989):

- *Create and re-create categories.* Group things in different ways; remember that people are constantly changing, so the categories into which you may group them also should change. Learn to see objects, events, and people as belonging to a wide variety of categories. Try to see, for example, your prospective romantic partner in a variety of roles—child, parent, employee, neighbor, friend, financial contributor, and so on.
- *Be open to new information.* Be open even in listening to different points of view that may contradict your most firmly held beliefs. New information forces you to reconsider what might be outmoded ways of thinking and can help you challenge long-held, but now inappropriate, beliefs and attitudes.
- *Beware of relying too heavily on first impressions* (Chanowitz & Langer, 1981; Langer, 1989). Treat first impressions as tentative, as hypotheses that need further investigation. Be prepared to revise, reject, or accept these initial impressions.
- *Think before you act.* Especially in delicate situations such as anger or commitment messages, it's wise to pause and think over the situation mindfully (DeVito, 2003). In this way you'll stand a better chance of acting and reacting appropriately.

You'll find frequent opportunities to apply mindful, critical thinking throughout your reading of the text but perhaps especially in the Skill Development Experiences, in the Communication Choice Points, and in the Test Yourself quizzes.

THE COMPETENT COMMUNICATOR IS CULTURALLY SENSITIVE

Communication competence is culture-specific; that is, the principles of effective communication vary from one culture to another, and what proves effective in one culture may prove ineffective in another. For example, in American culture you would call a person you wish to date three or four days in advance. In certain Asian cultures, you might call the person's parents weeks or even months in advance. Thus, discussions of cultural implications accompany all of the major topics considered in this text.

Some examples include the major ways in which cultures differ and the implications these differences have for communication; cultural differences in politeness; cultural and gender differences in nonverbal messages such as facial expressions, colors, touch, silence, and time; cultural differences in approaches to small group communication and leadership; and cultural differences in varied aspects of public speaking such as language usage and approaches to proof and evidence.

THE COMPETENT COMMUNICATOR IS ETHICAL

Human communication also involves questions of **ethics**, the study of good and bad, of right and wrong, of moral and immoral. Ethics is concerned with actions, with behaviors; it's



Communication Choice Point

Questionable Posts

Your friend has been posting some rather extreme socio-political statements that you think might turn out to be detrimental when searching for a graduate school or job. You've always been honest with each other but careful because you're both very sensitive to criticism. *What are some ways you can bring up this topic without seeming critical?*

concerned with distinguishing between behaviors that are moral (ethical, good, right) and those that are immoral (unethical, bad, wrong). Not surprisingly, there's an ethical dimension to any communication act (Neher & Sandin, 2007; Bok, 1978).

In addition to this introductory discussion, ethical dimensions of human communication are presented in each of the remaining chapters in *Communicating Ethically* boxes. As a kind of preview, here are just a few of the ethical issues raised. As you read these questions, think about your own ethical beliefs and how they would influence the way you answered the questions.

- What are your ethical obligations as a listener? (Chapter 3, p. 55)
- When is it unethical to remain silent? (Chapter 5, p. 111)
- At what point in a relationship do you have an obligation to reveal intimate details of your life? (Chapter 6, p. 121)
- Are there ethical and unethical ways to engage in conflict and conflict resolution? (Chapter 8, p. 163)
- When is gossiping ethical and when is it unethical? (Chapter 9, p. 184)



For a brief self-test on what is ethical, see “ABCD: Ethics” at tcbdevito.blogspot.com. Add your own comments to the many that you’ll find.

THE COMPETENT COMMUNICATOR IS AN EFFECTIVE LISTENER

Often we tend to think of competence in communication as “speaking effectiveness,” paying little attention to listening. But listening is an integral part of communication; you cannot be a competent communicator if you’re a poor listener.

If you measured importance by the time you spend on an activity, then—according to the research studies available—listening would be your most important communication activity. Studies conducted from 1929 to 1980 show that listening was the most often used form of communication. For example, in a study of college students conducted in 1980 (Barker, Edwards, Gaines, Gladney, & Holley), listening also occupied the most time: 53 percent compared to reading (17 percent), speaking (16 percent), and writing (14 percent). In a more recent survey, the figures for the four communication activities were listening (40%), talking (35%), reading (16%), and writing (9%) (Watkins, 2007). Again, listening is the most often used of all communication activities.

Because of the importance of listening, it is emphasized in this text in two major ways: (1) Chapter 3 is devoted exclusively to listening and covers the nature and importance of listening, the steps you go through in listening, the role of culture and gender in listening, and ways to increase your listening effectiveness. (2) In the remaining chapters, listening skills are integrated into the text discussions.



Objectives Self-Check

- Can you define *communication competence* and explain the four qualities identified as part of competence (mindful and critical thinking, cultural sensitivity, ethics, and effective listening)?



Messages in the Media *Wrap Up*

Situation comedies are replete with characters who have all types of communication problems. Watching your favorite sitcoms with the principles of communication discussed in this chapter in mind will help you see these concepts in operation in an imaginative variety of specific situations.



Summary of Concepts and Skills



Study and Review materials for this chapter are at **MyCommunicationLab**

Listen to the Audio Chapter Summary at MyCommunicationLab

This chapter considered the nature of human communication, its major elements and principles, the role of culture in human communication, and communication competence.

Foundations of Human Communication

1. Communication is the act, by one or more persons, of sending and receiving messages that are distorted by noise, occur within a context, have some effect (and some ethical dimension), and provide some opportunity for feedback.
2. Communication is transactional. It is a process of inter-related parts in which a change in one element produces changes in other elements.

Communication Models and Concepts

3. The essentials of communication—the elements present in every communication act—are sources–receivers; messages (feedforward, feedback, and metamessages); context (physical, cultural, social–psychological, and temporal); channel; noise (physical, physiological, psychological, and semantic); and effects.

Principles of Communication

4. Communication is purposeful. Through communication, you learn, relate, help, influence, and play.
5. Communication involves choices and those choices will determine effectiveness or ineffectiveness.
6. Communication and relationships are always—in part—ambiguous.
7. Communication involves both content and relationship dimensions.
8. Communication and relationships invariably involve issues of power.
9. Communication sequences are punctuated for processing. Individuals divide the communication sequence into stimuli and responses in different ways.
10. In any interactional situation, communication is inevitable (you cannot not communicate, nor can you not respond to communication), irreversible (you cannot take back messages), and unrepeatable (you cannot exactly repeat messages).

Culture and Human Communication

11. Culture permeates all forms of communication, and intercultural communication is becoming more and more frequent as the United States becomes home to a variety of cultures and does business around the world.
12. Significant dimensions along which cultures may differ are uncertainty avoidance, masculinity–femininity, power

distance, individualism–collectivism, and high and low context.

13. Ethnocentrism, existing on a continuum, is the tendency to evaluate the beliefs, attitudes, and values of our own culture positively and those of other cultures negatively.

Communication Competence

14. Communication competence refers to your knowledge of how communication works and your ability to use communication effectively. Communication competence includes, for example, thinking critically and mindfully, being culturally sensitive, communicating ethically and listening effectively.

Several important communication skills emphasized in this chapter are presented here in summary form (as they are in every chapter). These skill checklists don't include all the skills covered in the chapter but rather are representative of the most important skills. Place a check mark next to those skills that you feel you need to work on most.

- _____ 1. I'm sensitive to contexts of communication. I recognize that changes in physical, cultural, social–psychological, and temporal contexts will alter meaning.
- _____ 2. I assess my channel options and evaluate whether my message will be more effective if delivered face-to-face, through e-mail, or by some third party, for example.
- _____ 3. I look for meaning not only in words but also in nonverbal behaviors.
- _____ 4. I am sensitive to the feedback and feedforward that I give to others and that others give to me.
- _____ 5. I combat the effects of the various types of physical, psychological, and semantic noise that distort messages.
- _____ 6. I listen not only to the more obvious content messages but also to the relational messages that I (and others) send, and I respond to the relational messages of others to increase meaningful interaction.
- _____ 7. Instead of looking only at the punctuation patterns, I also look at the patterns that others might be using in order to understand better the meanings communicated.
- _____ 8. Because communication is transactional, I recognize that all elements influence every other element in the communication process and that each person communicating is simultaneously a speaker/listener.
- _____ 9. Because communication is purposeful, I look carefully at both the speaker's and the listener's purposes.

- _____ 10. Because communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable, I look carefully for hidden meanings, am cautious in communicating messages that I may later wish to withdraw, and am aware that any communication act occurs but once.
- _____ 11. I am sensitive to cultural variation and differences, and I see my own culture's teachings and those of other cultures without undue bias.



Key Word Quiz

The Essentials of Human Communication

Match the terms about human communication with their definitions. Record the number of the definition next to the appropriate term.

- _____ a. intrapersonal communication (3)
 _____ b. metamesages (6)
 _____ c. encoding (5)
 _____ d. communication competence (4)
 _____ e. computer-mediated communication (4)
 _____ f. feedback (6)
 _____ g. power (13)
 _____ h. transactional view of communication (5)
 _____ i. ethnocentrism (18)
 _____ j. ethnic identity (18)
1. Communication between two or more people through some electronic means

2. Knowledge of communication and the ability to apply that knowledge for effective communication
 3. The view of communication that sees each person as taking both speaker and listener roles simultaneously
 4. Communication with yourself
 5. Commitment to the beliefs and values of your culture
 6. The process of putting ideas into a code; for example, thinking of an idea and then describing it in words
 7. The tendency to see others and their behaviors through your own cultural filters
 8. The messages you get back from your own messages and from the responses of others to what you communicate
 9. Messages that refer to other messages
 10. The ability to influence the behaviors of others

These ten terms and additional terms used in this chapter can be found in the glossary.

Answers: a. 4 b. 9 c. 6 d. 2 e. 1 f. 8 g. 10 h. 3 i. 7 j. 5



Study and **Review** the **Flashcards** in **MyCommunicationLab**

MyCommunicationLab

Throughout this chapter, there are icons in the margin that highlight media content for selected topics. Go to **MyCommunicationLab** for additional information on the essentials of human communication. Here you'll find flashcards to help you learn the jargon of communication, videos that illustrate a variety of concepts, additional exercises, and discussions to help you continue your study of human communication.