COMMUNICATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

EDITION 4

A Survey of Communication

Communication in Everyday Life: A Survey of Communication offers an engaging introduction to communication based on the belief that communication and relationships are always interconnected. Best-selling authors Steve Duck and David T. McMahan incorporate this theme of a relational perspective and a focus on everyday communication to show the connections between concepts and how they can be understood through a shared perspective. Students will learn how topics in communication come together as part of a greater whole, as well as gain practical communication skills, from listening to critical thinking to using technology to communicate.

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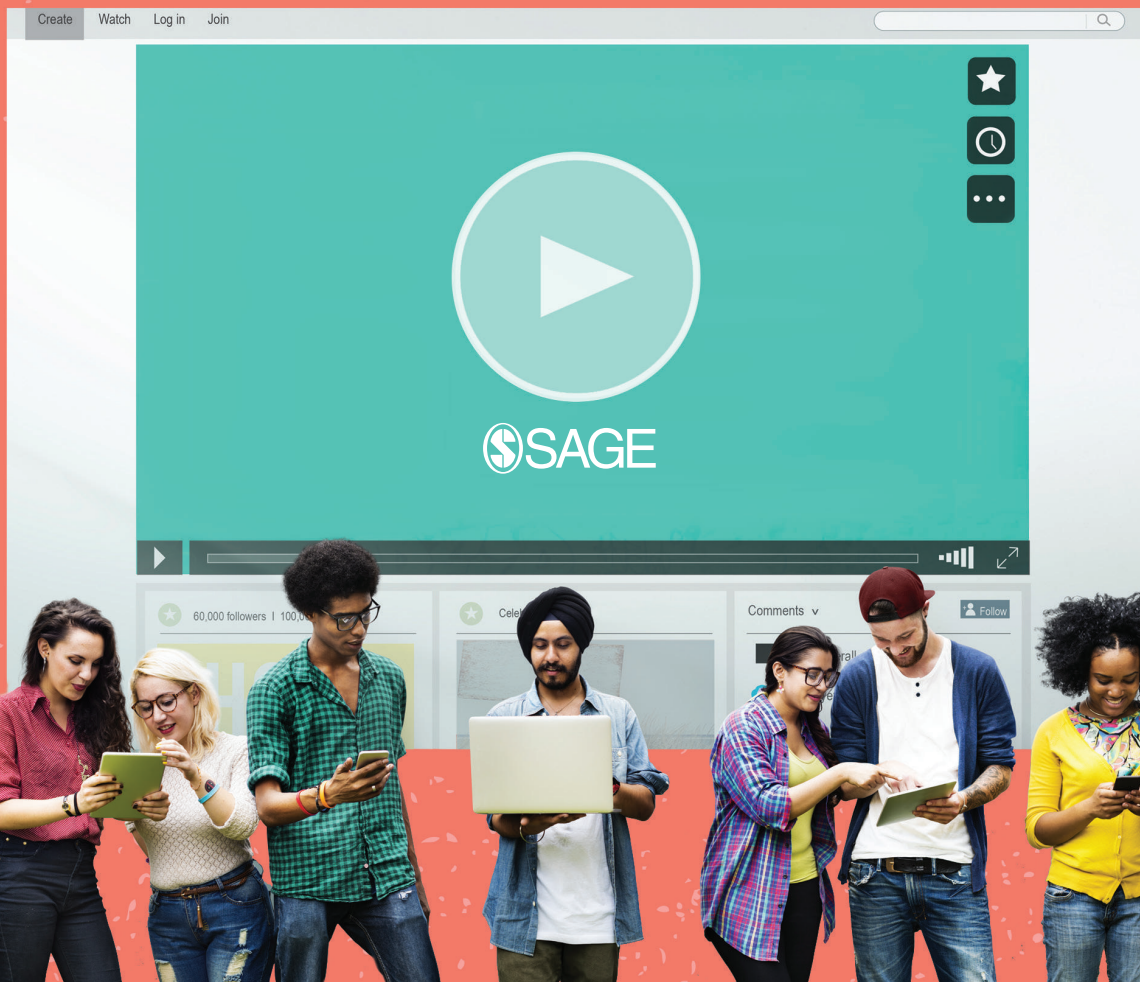
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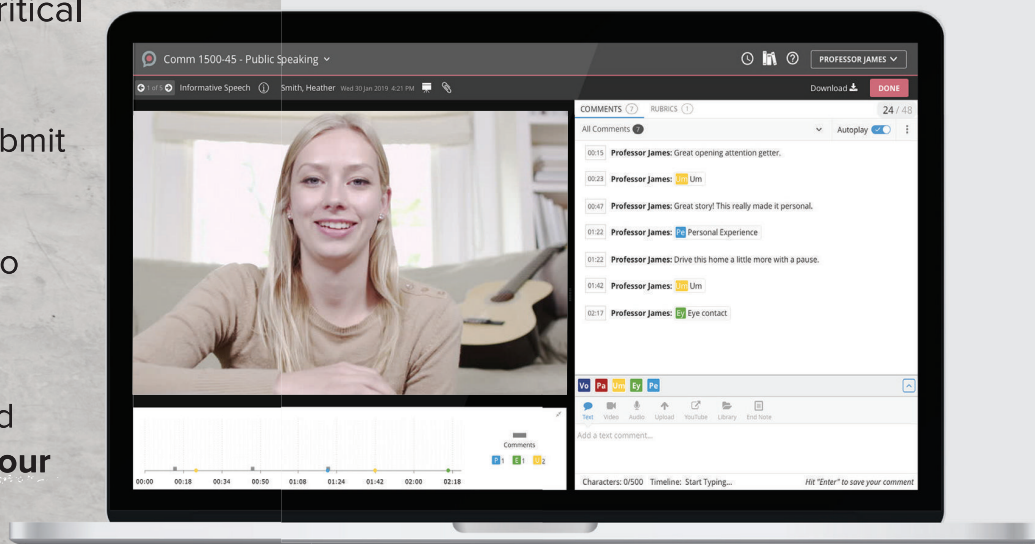
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Communication in Everyday Life

A Survey of Communication

Fourth Edition

From Steve:

To Elliot, just starting off in the relational world

From David:

To Jennifer forever

Communication in Everyday Life

A Survey of Communication

Fourth Edition

Steve Duck

David T. McMahan

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• Brief Contents •

• Detailed Contents •

• Preface •

Communication in Everyday Life: A Survey of Communication has been written to provide students with a new kind of introduction to the central issues and topics of communication. Accordingly, it can serve as the course textbook for general education courses in communication, as the course textbook for survey courses taken by communication majors, and as a resource for anyone interested in the study of communication. Yet it demonstrates a fresh approach.

So, what do we feel is new and different about our approach? Here are a few things:

First, this book includes discussions of material traditionally included in such textbooks. However, it also includes material conspicuously absent from other textbooks but increasingly relevant in the everyday lives of students, such as the continued relational integration of media and technology along with global influences.

Second, we incorporate a unifying theme of a *relational perspective* and a focus on *everyday communication.* We explore these ideas in greater detail shortly. Briefly, however, a relational perspective recognizes that relationships are central to people's understandings of the world, how people go about their lives, and especially how people communicate. This common theme allows topics to interconnect and allows students to approach topics from a shared perspective. Our focus on everyday communication recognizes that while there are big communication moments in life (e.g., meeting for the first time or a major disagreement), most communication is seemingly ordinary or mundane (e.g., making small talk with a classmate before class begins or deciding where to eat lunch with a friend). We examine some of the bigger moments, too. However, everyday communication is not only a more common and significant concern for students but also the place where most relational and life matters take place.

Third, this book is written in a conversational tone with an acknowledgment that students arrive at college with various levels of academic preparedness and that students come from a number of different backgrounds with diverse life experiences.

Fourth and finally, this book recognizes the value of well-developed learning tools for students and the benefits of robust ancillary materials for both students and instructors.

In what follows, we will introduce the relational perspective and the focus on everyday communication guiding this book. We will then examine pedagogical features, instructor support, and available ancillary materials.

A Relational Perspective and Everyday Communication

Topics in textbooks such as this one are frequently introduced only to be quickly left behind as students are introduced to ensuing topics. Issues of communication are discussed as if occurring in isolation, and a common thread or unifying theme is often absent. Like academic silos, each chapter houses a single topic, without any consideration about how topics may be interconnected and can be understood through a shared perspective.

The isolation of topics provides students with an artificial and unrealistic view of actual communication. It specifically obscures the interrelated nature of communication. For example, completely separating personal relationships and media conceals the fact that

in real life such media as television, video games, and the internet are often used and consumed in the (increasingly virtual) company of others, convey information about relationships, and serve as topics of everyday talk. Likewise, social media are explicitly used to conduct and maintain relationships, while health care and social support are based in relationship activity.

In addition to further separating topics, the lack of a common theme prevents students from recognizing how topics in communication fit and come together as part of a greater whole and how they might be studied in a coherent fashion. The everyday use of interpersonal communication is a universal experience, and attempts to both teach and understand it are founded in teacher–student rapport and based around recognition of the universals of human experience.

Within this book, topics are frequently introduced and discussed in connection with other topics. Naturally, this approach runs the risk of focusing too much on these connections and not enough on each specific topic. However, this approach is accomplished in such a manner that students are reminded of other topics and provided with an awareness of the interconnected nature of communication.

Relational Perspective

The relational perspective is based on the belief that communication and relationships are interconnected. Relationships impact communication, and communication impacts relationships. Relationships flow into daily experiences, and all communication has a relationship assumed underneath it. At the same time, relationships are developed, maintained, and modified through communication.

Relationships are an inherent part of any topic of communication. Interactions among those with whom a personal relationship is shared are often the basis of identity construction and influence perceptions of the world. Relationships guide our use and understanding of both verbal and nonverbal communication. Culture and society are created and performed through relationships and specific other people. Recognizing the type of relationship shared will assist people when engaged in the listening process. Families, groups, and the workplace can be understood not as structures but as the enactment of relational communication. Relationships influence health decisions and health-related activities. People use media and technology relationally more than as individuals. Relationships often serve as the basis for influencing another person. And successful interviews involve the creation of relationships among interviewers and interviewees.

Given the variety of their educational backgrounds, demographic characteristics, and experiences, all students share the fact that their understanding of the world has been formed and influenced by relationships. The relational perspective makes the importance and operation of communication more understandable through direct connections to the experience of all students and therefore will facilitate classroom discussion while channeling and capitalizing on students' natural interests.

Everyday Communication

The discipline of communication has traditionally focused on the "big" moments or seemingly extraordinary events of human interaction. These instances might include initial encounters, arguments, betrayals, dramatic self-disclosures, or other intense occurrences. These events may be memorable, but they are not all that common.

In actuality, most of a person's life experiences and interactions with others are of the everyday, seemingly ordinary, and seemingly dull variety. This everyday communication

might include brief conversations while getting ready for school or work, a quick text message between classes, or talking while watching video clips online (or sharing those clips as a means of expressing common interests and relationship). The content of these interactions might include schedules, the weather, what to eat, or any other seemingly mundane topic.

Everyday communication may not always be memorable, but it is very important. Beyond the frequency of this sort of interaction, major portions of a person's life take shape through routine, seemingly mundane everyday communication. Everyday communication creates, maintains, challenges, and alters relationships and identities as well as culture, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, meaning, and even reality.

We will, of course, discuss major moments and events in human interaction when appropriate. However, we will always return to the significance of communication in every-day life and how references to everyday lived experiences will assist students in understanding the material.

Pedagogical Features

We view the pedagogical features within textbooks as fundamental elements in the comprehension and incorporation of the material being presented. Rather than using them as meaningless filler or only to break up the text, we use them to provide students with a better understanding of the material and a better appreciation for its importance and application in everyday life. These pedagogical tools have been tested in our own and other classrooms and provide students with opportunities to enhance their learning.

Overview

To help guide the students, each chapter begins by introducing students to the topic and setting up the key issues that will be addressed. **Learning Outcomes** are also posed in the opening spread to further direct students through the chapter.

Chapter Boxes

The main body of the chapters includes the following pedagogical boxes: (1) Communication and Career, (2) Communication and Social Engagement, (3) Disciplinary Debate, (4) Diverse Voices, and (5) Ethical Issues. Each of these boxes includes questions for students to further consider what is being discussed.

Communication and Career boxes present students with guides to integrate the material into their careers. **Communication and Social Engagement** boxes examine the material in connection to social and civic engagement and activism. **Disciplinary Debate** boxes encourage critical thinking by asking students to consider competing views within communication scholarship or positions that counter those presented in the text. **Diverse Voices** boxes expand discussion of content to a multicultural perspective. **Ethical Issues** boxes urge students to contemplate and develop a position regarding ethical quandaries that arise in communication.

Photographs

Photographs included in each chapter also serve as pedagogical tools. Each photo caption is stated in the form of a question that corresponds with material being discussed. Students will be asked to examine the photograph and answer the accompanying question based on their understanding of the material.

End-of-Chapter Pedagogical Materials

Each chapter also ends with pedagogical materials that bring the overview and focus questions full circle. **Learning Outcomes Revisited** are implemented as a way of summarizing chapter material via pedagogical structure rather than as a simple (and usually ignored) chapter summary. Also, instead of including review questions, which often only establish lower levels of comprehension, each chapter includes (a) Communication and You and (b) Technology Connections. These features enable students to further examine how the chapter material fits within their communicative lives as a whole. **Communication and You** questions ask students to consider the material in relation to their lives and lived experiences. Specifically, this feature will sensitize students to issues and encourage them to become careful observers of the activities and events going on in their lives, compelling them to examine and apply the material. **Technology Connections** questions lead students to draw from media to further explore the issues discussed in each chapter.

Conversational Tone

To further assist student learning, we have deliberately adopted an informal and conversational tone in our writing, and we even throw in a few jokes. We are not attempting to be hip or cool: Trust us; we are far from either, so much so that we are not even sure if the words *hip* and *cool* are used anymore. Are *tight* and *dope* now used? Regardless, we use a conversational voice because we believe that it makes this book more engaging to read. Plus, we genuinely enjoy talking about this material. We want to share our enthusiasm in a way that we hope is infectious.

Student Support

In addition to pedagogical features within the text, a host of learning tools are available to students online. From our own experiences in the classroom, we have discovered that students who take advantage of these extra features gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the material and tend to do much better on examinations and in the course overall. Multimedia content is available, along with web quizzes, eFlashcards, and much more. We encourage you to take advantage of all that we have to offer.

Instructor Support

Although a fundamental feature of the book is, of course, to update discussion of topics by integrating the latest research while providing a new relationally based perspective on the material normally included in traditional texts, this is a two-edged sword. A challenge associated with developing a textbook—especially one offering an original approach and addressing more up-to-date issues of communication—is that many instructors already have their courses in good shape and do not need the extra burden of rewriting those courses to fit a completely new text. We have therefore sought to add material in a way that supplements and develops rather than replaces traditional material. By this means, we seek to support those teachers who have already developed useful courses and who want to add some spice from the newer research without having to completely revise their existing lectures and notes. Thus, although the present text updates much of the theory and research included in older-style texts, we have constructed this book to reflect the traditional basic text design. A host of ancillary materials are also available that would benefit both new and experienced instructors.

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• A Personal Note to Readers •

Communication in Everyday Life: A Survey of Communication was developed with the belief that introductory communication courses play a central role in the discipline by attracting new majors, providing a foundation for upper-level courses, and supporting the entire academic community as important general education requirements and preparations for future life. The basic course is not just about training students in a discipline. It is about educating them more broadly for life beyond college and instilling within them an inquisitive curiosity—and the tools to employ it well—that will serve them throughout their lives. It is one of the most important courses a student of any discipline will take.

Accordingly, we did not want to present students with a cookie-cutter book that looks and reads like every other textbook published in the past few decades. Many publishers encouraged us to do just that! Rather, if we were to develop a new textbook, it had to bring something fresh and meaningful to the study of communication.

We believe that our relational perspective and focus on everyday life provides students with a coherent structure to their study of communication and an opportunity to apply the familiar experience of their own personal and professional lives to increase their understanding of them.

We believe that some traditional material such as verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and listening should be included in any introductory course. But other material such as social media and technology, culture, and family is conspicuously absent from other books despite each of them being an integral part of students' lives.

We believe that a writing style can be achieved that is engaging and accessible to all readers at any level of academic preparedness. Students new to college should find the writing understandable while increasing their ability to study and comprehend the material. Students at advanced levels of preparedness should find the writing suitable for the collegiate level. No students should ever feel as if they are being presented with insultingly simple prose. Rather, the writing should be at appropriate and manageable levels and feel like it was written by humans.

We believe that books should not be written only for the "traditional student"—an assumed 18- to 22-year-old upper-middle-class student who does not work, whose parents are paying for college, and who plans on spending spring break on an exotic beach somewhere. We have nothing against such students, but we just recognize that many students are older, struggling financially, or paying their own way through college. Many students work at least one job while going to school, and some of them have children of their own to care for as they study. Like ours when we were in school, their spring breaks will be spent working additional hours rather than lounging on the sand.

We believe that pedagogical tools within the text such as boxes and photos should be more than just meaningless filler and should instead be focused on teaching and learning. Further, whenever possible, photographs should depict realistic-looking people in realistic situations rather than models or celebrities depicting unrealistic and theatrical communication.

Finally, we believe that ancillary materials such as self-quizzes, activities, and internet resources should be developed to benefit students, new instructors, and experienced instructors alike. We also wanted to ensure that these ancillary materials were available to

all students and not just those students purchasing a new copy of the book rather than a used copy of the book.

To substantiate, challenge, and build on these beliefs, we engaged in extensive discussions with our fellow course instructors and directors as well as students throughout the United States and other countries. We wanted to know what they needed in a textbook, what worked and did not work with previous textbooks, and what innovations must be included. Primarily because of their input and encouragement during all facets of its development and production, the first edition of *Communication in Everyday Life: A Survey of Communication* was met with an overwhelmingly positive response. These discussions continued once the first edition was published and remained fundamental in the development and production of subsequent editions.

This fourth edition has enabled us to advance the components that worked so well in the previous editions and to include additional features and modifications to enhance its use in communication classrooms. In general, we have streamlined much of the text in order to increase its readability. Numerous tables and charts have also been included to help readers synthesize the material. Most of the original photographs have been replaced, and many additional photographs have been included. Fresh and additional pedagogical boxes have been included in each chapter. In response to instructor and student comments, the coverage of some material has been rearranged, removed, increased, or added. The latest research and findings have been incorporated throughout each of the chapters, as have updated discussions and examples. We are thankful for the success of the previous editions and are excited about the potential impact of the fourth edition.

We are passionate about the study of communication and are deeply committed to its instruction. It is our sincere hope that everyone who reads this book will experience improved understanding and enjoyment of communication. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to share our enthusiasm for communication and the opportunity to demonstrate its importance and application in everyday life.

—Steve and David

• Acknowledgments •

A book such as this one is a tremendous undertaking, and we are grateful to the many people who have contributed to the development of this volume. We are thankful to our students, both graduate and undergraduate, who knowingly or unknowingly provided observations, examples, and thoughtful discussion of the ideas presented here. We are also thankful to the instructors and students who have used the previous editions of the book as well as our other books for allowing us into their classrooms. Many of them enabled us to live out the relational perspective through personal contact by phone and e-mail and through much-appreciated visits on campuses and at conferences. Their feedback and encouragement are greatly appreciated and have enhanced this volume in immeasurable ways.

We also wish to extend our warm appreciation to copy editor extraordinaire Melinda Masson, whose detailed eye and sensitivity to author voice position her without equal. We were thrilled to work with her again, and she brought joy to this project.

Involvement in such books takes an enormous toll on relational life. We are extremely thankful to our respective families and friends. Their forbearance provides a supportive atmosphere for us to manage the long hours and extended absences required to bring such projects to completion. Beyond their acceptance of long absences and of seeing the back of our heads more often than the front of them as we sat at our computers, we are especially grateful for the suggestions and comments of Ben Lawson-Duck, Gabriel Lawson-Duck, and Jennifer McMahan as they withstood discussions about what we happened to be working on at a given moment.

Additionally, we would like to thank all of our parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, extended families, colleagues, acquaintances, strangers we have encountered, people we like, and people we despise, all of whom have provided us with ideas for a relational perspective of communication.

We are also indebted to the following people for their unstinting generosity in commenting on the textbook despite their incredibly busy schedules and for making many brilliant suggestions that we were all too happy to borrow or appropriate without acknowledgment other than here. They generously contributed to whatever this book in its turn contributes to the growth and development of the field. We could not have fully developed the relational perspective and conveyed the impact of everyday communication without their professionalism and thoughtfulness.

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Steve Duck taught in the United Kingdom before taking up the Daniel and Amy Starch Distinguished Research Chair in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Iowa. He has been a professor of communication studies, an adjunct professor of psychology, and a former Dean's Administrative Fellow and is now Chair of the Rhetoric Department. He has taught interpersonal communication courses, mostly on relationships but also on nonverbal communication, communication in everyday life, construction of identity, communication theory, organizational leadership, and procedures and practices for leaders. More recently, he has taught composition, speaking, and rhetoric, especially for STEM students. By training an interdisciplinary thinker, Steve has focused on the development and decline of relationships, although he has also done research on the dynamics of television production techniques and persuasive messages in health contexts. Steve has written or edited 60 books on relationships and other matters and was the founder and, for the first 15 years, the editor of the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. His book *Meaningful Relationships: Talking, Sense, and Relating* won the G. R. Miller Book Award from the Interpersonal Communication Division of the National Communication Association. Steve cofounded a series of international conferences on personal relationships. He won the University of Iowa's first Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award in 2001 and the National Communication Association's Robert J. Kibler Memorial Award in 2004 for "dedication to excellence, commitment to the profession, concern for others, vision of what could be, acceptance of diversity, and forthrightness." He was the 2010 recipient of the UI College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Helen Kechriotis Nelson Teaching Award for a lifetime of excellence in teaching, and in the same year was elected one of the National Communication Association's Distinguished Scholars. He received the NCA's 2019 Mark L. Knapp Award in Interpersonal Communication for career contributions to the study of interpersonal communication. He hopes to make it to the Iowa State Fair one day.

David T. McMahan received his PhD from the University of Iowa in 2001. With research focusing on the social aspects of media and technology, personal relationships, and rhetorical criticism, he is the author of multiple books, and his research and scholarship have been published in numerous academic journals and edited volumes. He was named a Centennial Scholar by the Eastern Communication Association. David has taught courses that span the discipline of communication, including numerous courses in interpersonal communication and personal relationships, media and technology, communication education, theory, and criticism. He has been honored to receive multiple awards for his work in the classroom. A tremendously active member of the discipline, David's extensive record of service includes president of the Central States Communication Association, editor of the *Iowa Journal of Communication*, and consulting editor of the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, along with membership and activity on a vast number of academic committees, executive boards, and editorial boards. He will serve as president of the National Communication Association in 2021. David hopes to one day have the winning entry in the Super Bull competition at the Iowa State Fair.

Communication Foundations

Steve Duck

1

An Overview of Communication

C an you think of anything important in your life that does not involve communication? In reality we do not think it is possible for anyone to legitimately come up with any aspect of life that does not involve communication and that would not be made better by the ability to understand communication more thoroughly. Just consider some of the areas covered in this book. You will have the opportunity to examine such topics as friendships and romantic relationships, media, technology, cultures, personal and public influence, families, health care, and the workplace. You will learn about how your communication and the communication of others influence and actually develop these and many other areas of your life.

We are passionate about the study of communication, and we believe very strongly that you can benefit from knowing more about how communication works. We wrote this

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Explain how communication is symbolic.
2. Explain how meaning is established.
3. Explain how communication is cultural.
4. Explain how communication is relational.
5. Explain the use of communication frames.
6. Explain what it means to view communication as both representational and presentational.
7. Explain what it means to view communication as a transaction.

book partly because we believe that everyone needs to know more about communication. *Communication in Everyday Life* will help you better understand—and even improve—your life through better understanding of communication.

Within this initial chapter, we will examine what communication entails. You will likely discover that something you have been doing all of your life is more complex than you might think. You will also discover that communication is more than just sending and receiving symbols (something we will soon discuss). It is actually a lot more than just sending and receiving symbols, and this chapter will establish the foundation for fully understanding the importance and impact of communication in your life. To get things started, we will discuss two primary features of this textbook: *everyday communication* and the *relational perspective*.

Everyday Communication and the Relational Perspective

One thing making this book different from other communication textbooks is its focus on *everyday communication*. The discipline of communication has traditionally focused on the "big" moments or seemingly extraordinary events of human interaction. These instances include initial encounters, betrayals, disclosure of secret information, family upheavals, and other dramatic experiences you may occasionally encounter during your lifetime. These events may be memorable, but they do not make up much of a person's lived experiences. For instance, romantic relationships only rarely feature moments in which partners hold hands, gaze into one another's eyes, and share their deepest darkest secrets and declarations of unending love.

In actuality, most interactions of romantic partners are of the everyday, seemingly ordinary, or even seemingly dull variety. This everyday communication might include brief conversations as they get ready for work or school, a quick text between classes or during a break, talking while eating a quick lunch, or FaceTiming while watching videos online. The content of these conversations is seemingly mundane and may include

Is the connection between relationships and communication really that significant?
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topics such as schedules, weather, what to eat, what to watch online, what bills need paying, or even the source of a foul odor.

Everyday communication may not always be memorable, but it happens to be incredibly important. Major portions of a person's life take shape through routine, seemingly mundane everyday communication. Everyday communication creates, maintains, challenges, and alters relationships and identities as well as culture, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, meaning, and even reality. Everyday communication should be studied not just because of its frequency in our lives but also because extraordinary things happen through everyday communication. We are not saying that big moments are not worthy of attention, and we will occasionally talk about those as well. However, when discussing all types of communication, we will continuously interconnect them with your everyday life and experiences.

Something else that sets this book apart from other communication textbooks is the relational perspective that we have developed through our books and research. The constant guide in understanding communication will be the relationships that you have with other people. The relational perspective is based on the belief that communication and relationships are interconnected. Any type of communication you ever participate in has a relationship assumed underneath it.

The relationship shared by people will influence what is communicated, how it is shared, and the meanings that develop. People generally talk with friends in a different way than with their parents. Coworkers generally talk with one another in a different way than with their supervisors. The meanings of communication also change depending on the relationships. For instance, saying "I love you" will take on a different meaning if said to a romantic partner, a friend, a family member, a supervisor, or someone you just met. In turn, communication creates, reinforces, and modifies all relationships. Saying "I love you" can do many things. It can lead to the creation of a new relationship, strengthen a relationship, maintain a relationship, or result in the realization that people do not view a relationship in the same way. Ultimately, the link between relationships and communication is undeniable, and it can be used to study all communicative activity.

We sincerely believe that your life as a student, friend, romantic partner, colleague, and family member can be improved through the study of communication. Whatever your purpose in reading this book, and whatever your ultimate goal in life, we hope that it will enrich your life by sharpening your abilities to observe and understand communication activities going on around you.

What Is Communication?

In introductory chapters such as this one, you might expect the primary subject to be defined. In this case, you might be looking for an authoritative definition of *communication* that may very well show up on an examination you will take in the near future. Well, here is one you might like: *Communication* is the transactional use of symbols, influenced, guided, and understood in the context of relationships. Actually, that definition is not half bad, but it does not really do justice to what communication really entails.

A number of definitions of communication are out there, and many of those definitions are very acceptable. More than four decades ago, a list of 126 definitions of *communication* appearing in communication scholarship was compiled (Dance & Larson, 1976). Imagine the number of definitions that must have emerged since then! Of course, education should go beyond memorizing a definition and rather should explore deeper issues or characteristics of an issue or a topic, so that is exactly what will be done in this chapter.

One fact that makes the study of communication unique, compared with, say, chemistry, is that you have been communicating your entire life. Previous experience with this topic can be beneficial, because you will be able to draw from relationships and events in

your own life when studying the material. You will even be able to apply the material—and, we hope, improve your communication abilities and life in general along the way.

The drawback to previous experience is that people may not see the value in studying something that is such a common part of life. You may even be asking the "big deal" questions: What is so problematic about communication? Why bother to explain it? Don't people know what it is about and how it works? Communication is just about sending messages, right?

True: Most of the time, people communicate without thinking, and it is not usually awkward. However, if communicating is so easy, why do people have misunderstandings, conflicts, arguments, disputes, and disagreements? Why do people get embarrassed because they have said something thoughtless? Why, then, are allegations of sexual harassment sometimes denied vigorously, and how can there ever be doubt whether one person intentionally touched another person inappropriately? Why are some family members such a problem, and what is it about their communication that makes them difficult? Why is communication via e-mail or text message so easy to misunderstand? None of these problems would occur if people who asked the previous "big deal" questions were right.

Is communication simply the exchange of messages?
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When first coming to the study of communication, many people assume that communication simply involves the sending of messages from person to person through the spoken word, text messages, Twitter updates, or Instagram posts. That basic view has some truth to it, but communication involves a lot more than merely transmitting information from Person A to Person B.

As you read this chapter, you will likely start to recognize that communication is more complex than it initially appears. Let's begin by examining a common situation, a restaurant server speaking to customers:

> "Hi! My name is Flo, and I'll be your server today. Our special is a bowl of soup for $3.95. If you have any questions about the menu, let me know."

What you may already suppose about communication before studying it formally may be somewhat obvious in this example. Words are being used to convey information from one person to another person. Upon closer inspection, however, much more activity is taking place in this basic exchange.

The message is made up of words or symbols, which are used to allow one idea or representation to stand for something else. Taken-for-granted cultural assumptions are being made when these symbols are selected. "Menu" rather than "a list of all the food that we prepare, cook, and serve in this restaurant for you to choose for your meal" is said because it is assumed the customer will know the code word *menu* and its meaning in a restaurant rather than its meaning on a computer screen. If you are a member of a culture in which this sort of interaction is common, it all likely makes sense.

The server's message may also make sense because you know how to "perform/communicate restaurant." The comments are appropriate only in some places and at some times. If Flo were standing in the middle of a park screaming those words at everyone who passed by, you would likely think she was mentally unstable. They also make sense only at the beginning of the interaction, not during the meal or when the customer is leaving the restaurant.

Notice also how the message makes the interaction work in a particular way, setting up one person (server) in a particular kind of relationship with the other person (customer) while setting that relationship up as friendly and casual ("Hi," not "A thousand welcomes, great ones. Command me as you will, and I shall obey").

You have built-in expectations about the relationship between a server and a customer. You already know and take for granted that these relational differences exist in restaurants and that restaurants have "servers" who generally carry out instructions of "customers." Therefore, you expect the customer will be greeted, treated with some respect by the server, told what "the special" is, and asked to make choices. You know the customer will eventually pay for the food and that the server is there not only to bring food, water, the check, and change but also to help resolve any difficulties understanding the menu. Flo will answer any questions about the way the food is prepared or help if you need to find the restrooms. Both the customer and the server take this for granted; it is a cultural as well as relational element of communication.

This relatively brief encounter also demonstrates that communication is more than just the exchange of messages. It may appear as though a simple message involving the greeting, the speaker's name and job, her relationship to you, and the nature of the special on the menu is being sent to the customer. Beyond the transmission of a simple message, however, something will take place as a result of the message exchange. Further, worlds of meaning are being created, and personal perspectives are being displayed. Additional issues such as gender, status, power, and politeness are being negotiated. All of these things and much more are taking place within this simple exchange.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will introduce and begin our initial discussion of seven key characteristics of communication: (1) Communication is symbolic, (2) communication requires meaning, (3) communication is cultural, (4) communication is relational, (5) communication involves frames, (6) communication is both presentational and representational, and (7) communication is a transaction. Examining these characteristics will provide a better understanding of what communication and its study really involve.

symbols: arbitrary representations of ideas, objects, people, relationships, cultures, genders, races, and so forth

sign: a consequence or an indicator of something specific, which cannot be changed by arbitrary actions or labels (e.g., "wet streets are a sign of rain")

Communication Is Symbolic

All communication is characterized by the use of symbols. A **symbol** is an arbitrary representation of something else. This may be an object, an idea, a place, a person, or a relationship—to name only a few. As we discuss in the upcoming chapters, symbols are either verbal or nonverbal. Verbal communication involves language, whereas nonverbal communication involves all other symbols. Accordingly, a symbol can be a word, a movement, a sound, a picture, a logo, a gesture, a mark, or anything else that represents something other than itself.

To fully understand symbols, we can begin by discussing what they are not. Although the terms *symbol* and *sign* are sometimes used interchangeably, they do not represent the same thing. **Signs** are consequences or indicators of something specific, which human beings cannot change by their arbitrary actions or labels.

As close to a moose placed on a pole as we are going to get, this particular traffic sign is actually warning motorists of a moose crossing rather than instructing them to stop. Are traffic signs really signs, or are they symbols?
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For example, wet streets may be a sign that it has rained; smoke is a sign of fire. There is a direct causal connection between smoke and fire and between wet streets and rain.

Symbols, however, have no direct connection with that which they represent. They have been arbitrarily selected. For instance, the word *chair* has been arbitrarily chosen to represent the objects on which we sit, and other languages present the same item in different symbolic ways (e.g., *cathedra*, *sella*, *chaise*, *stoel*, and *zetel*). We call a chair a *chair* simply because the symbol made up of the letters *c*, *h*, *a*, *i*, and *r* has been chosen to represent that object. There is nothing inherent within that object that connects it to the symbol *chair*.

DIVERSE VOICES

THE CASE OF THE MISSING TOILET AND SOMETHING TO DRINK

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Because symbols are arbitrary representations of something else, they can be different in different cultures. When Steve's mother first came to the United States from England, for example, she could find directions not to "toilets" but only to "restrooms," and she did not want a rest. Eventually, she had to ask someone. The euphemism *restroom* is not immediately obvious to cultural outsiders as a reference to toilet facilities. In other cultures—for example, in England—they may be referred to as "conveniences" or by a sign saying "WC" (meaning water closet).

Cultural challenges associated with the use of symbols are not just confined to different countries. Within the United States, the words *pop*, *soda*, *cola*, and *soft drink* are all used to represent the same thing. Those might not be problematic, but some people in the United States use the brand name *Coke* to refer to all carbonated beverages. That could lead to difficulties—for instance, if Flo the waitress asks people unfamiliar with that usage what kind of coke they want when they really want a Mountain Dew. Regardless, if you drink too much, it is a good idea to know where the nearest *convenience* is located.

Questions to Consider

1. What cultural differences in terms have you personally experienced?

2. If challenges occurred, how did you overcome them?

Nothing about the symbol *chair* connects it to that object. Once again, a symbol is an arbitrary representation.

It is sometimes difficult to recognize that symbols are simply arbitrary representations. It sometimes might seem as though there is a natural connection rather than an arbitrary connection. A stop sign—or more appropriately stop *symbol*—is one example of how people tend to see symbols as naturally linked to what they represent. It may seem natural that a red octagon with the capital letters *S*, *T*, *O*, and *P* written in the middle would compel people to cease forward movement when driving an automobile. However, there is no direct connection between that symbol and that particular behavior. A giant moose placed on a pole could arbitrarily represent that same course of action just as naturally as the symbol people call a *stop sign* arbitrarily represents that action. There is no direct causal connection between a symbol and what it represents.

Communication Requires Meaning

Communication requires that symbols convey **meaning**, what a symbol represents. Seems simple enough. However, meanings assigned to symbols change based on multiple contexts, other symbols being used (both verbal and nonverbal), and even the way that symbols are being sent. Something else to consider: People did not just wake up one day and decide *chair* was suddenly going to represent that object you sit on. Rather, meaning associated with that symbol developed over time as people used the symbol when communicating with one another. And, the development of meaning does not suddenly stop. Instead, it continues as long as a symbol continues to be used.

meaning: what a symbol represents

We will examine these ideas within this section. And, we will begin with the social construction of meaning—giving you a better idea of how *chair* did come to represent that object you sit on.

Social Construction of Meaning

Social construction involves the way in which symbols take on meaning in a social context or society as they are used over time. Words and phrases used every day within the society to which you belong did not originate with previously established meanings. Rather, the taken-for-granted meanings attached to these symbols have developed through repeated and adapted use over time.

Meaning has to develop somehow, and it happens when groups of people use particular symbols. To demonstrate this idea, we can use a bent paper clip as an example. To our knowledge, there is no word or symbol for a bent paper clip, so we will just randomly use the made-up word *abdak*—which seems as good a word as any. One day, your instructor decides that there is a need to use a word to convey bent paper clip and selects *abdak* to do so. (Stay with us; we are going somewhere with this example!) So, from now on, in that particular class, students refer to bent paper clips as *abdaks*. In another course, you see a bent paper clip and refer to it as an *abdak*. You might have to explain to your classmates in that course what you mean, or they might just figure it is a word they had never come across and take for granted you know what you are talking about. Then, other people use it, again and again, all over campus. The term *abdak* soon becomes a word used and understood on your campus, and using and understanding that word might even indicate being a member of the campus community.

Yet, *abdak* does not stop there. Members of your campus community use the term when interacting with people from other schools. Next thing you know, *abdak* is a term used in academic settings. Then, when used by academics with their nonacademic friends, family, and acquaintances, it becomes a term generally recognized by most people. Eventually, the symbol made up of the letters *a*, *b*, *d*, *a*, and *k* becomes recognized and understood just as the symbol made up of the letters *c*, *h*, *a*, *i*, and *r* is recognized and understood.

COMMUNICATION AND CAREER

LEARNING THE LINGO

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The social construction of meaning is often discussed more broadly in terms of large societal groups. However, the same thing happens within smaller groups. For instance, your group of friends or family members might use certain words or phrases that have particular shared meanings just for that group.

The same thing occurs in workplaces. It might involve symbols used and recognized within a broad industry. It might also involve symbols used and recognized within a single business or even a small group of employees within that business.

Especially when beginning a new job, it is important to pick up on the unique meanings associated with certain words and phrases as soon as possible. Using them correctly not only enables you to accomplish your work more easily but also enables you to establish membership into that group.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some examples of symbols with meanings unique to places you have worked?

2. Why do you think knowing the unique meanings associated with such symbols is so important to establishing membership or connecting with a group?

The meanings associated with and assigned to any symbol have been socially constructed. In other words, through the social and relational use of symbols, meanings become associated and assigned. Something else to consider is that this process happens continuously. So, over time, original meanings can be lost, and new meanings can vary wildly. Someday, you might call someone an *abdak*, and that person will be offended!

Meaning and Context

A single symbol or message can also have multiple meanings when used in different contexts. For example, the *physical context*, or the actual location in which a symbol is used, will affect its meaning. If you said "There is a fire" while in a campground, it would mean something entirely different than if you said those exact same words while in a crowded movie theater.

The same symbols will also differ in meaning according to the *relational context*, or the relationship shared by the people interacting. Look again at the earlier example of saying "I love you." It means

What type of communication context involves physical locations?
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something vastly different said to you by your mother, your brother, your friend, your priest, your instructor, someone you have been dating for more than a year, or someone you have just met on a blind date.

The *situational context* will also affect the meaning of a symbol. Consider the phrase "I love you" said by the same person (e.g., your mother) on your birthday, after a fight with her, on her deathbed, at Thanksgiving, or at the end of a phone call.

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

INTERNET ACTIVISM
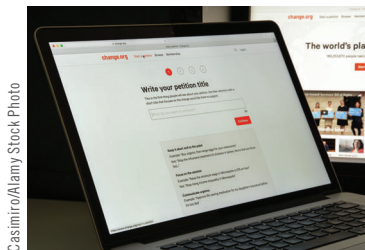
Casimiro/Alamy Stock Photo

In the not-so-distant past, social activism required face-to-face marches and protests, printed pamphlets, and phone calls to convey a message. Now, these methods of communicating are being supplemented with or replaced by internet activism. There are many different forms of internet activism, ranging from hacking into secure computer systems to including a hashtagged motto at the end of a post. Some people claim that such activism is not as meaningful or effective when compared with other forms of activism. Other people claim that such activism is just as meaningful as and even more effective than other forms of activism.

Regardless of one's perspective, different media systems might result in different meanings assigned to the same message. Consider the same motto chanted during a march, written on a billboard, printed on a pamphlet, stated during a phone call, or appearing as a hashtag at the end of an internet post.

Questions to Consider

1. What impact do you think these media systems would have on the meaning assigned to the same message?

2. Do you think one medium is more influential than others at bringing about social change?

Verbal and Nonverbal Influence on Meaning

Accompanying verbal and nonverbal symbols will also affect meaning. For instance, the same words send different messages depending on how they are delivered. Using "I love you" as an example once again, consider those words said by a romantic partner in a short, sharp way; in a long, lingering way; with a frown; with a smile; or with a hesitant and questioning tone of voice. We discuss the interaction between verbal and nonverbal communication in greater detail later in the book. For now, however, just recognize how determining meaning is more complex than it may originally seem.

Meaning and the Medium

medium: means through which a message is conveyed

The **medium**, or the means through which a message is conveyed, will also affect the meaning of a message. A medium might include sound waves or sight—especially when interacting face-to-face with someone. It can also include smartphones, text messages, e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, social networking sites, a note placed on someone's windshield, smoke signals, or many other methods of communication.

The topic is especially important in cases involving a medium. For instance, breaking up with a romantic partner can be accomplished using any of the means listed, but some may be deemed more appropriate than others. Breaking up with someone face-to-face may be considered more appropriate than sending him or her a text message. Beyond the message of wanting to break up, additional messages, including how you view the romantic partner, the relationship itself, and yourself, are conveyed based on the medium used.

Communication Is Cultural

Another characteristic of communication is that it is cultural. Different cultures make different assumptions and take different knowledge for granted. Each time you talk to someone, from your culture or another, you are taking knowledge for granted, doing what your culture expects, and treating people in ways the culture acknowledges. You are doing, performing, and enacting your culture through communication.

Ultimately, culture influences communication, and communication creates and reinforces these cultural influences. Consider what took place during your most recent face-to-face conversation with someone. Did you greet this person with a kiss or a handshake? Was there

ETHICAL ISSUES
FAKING IT

In general, communicating in a manner consistent with another person's cultural expectations will result in increased liking by that person and being able to influence that person should that be a goal of the interaction. Accordingly, in such situations, people are often taught and encouraged to adjust how they normally communicate to match the expectations of the other person. However, is communicating in a manner consistent with someone else's cultural expectations but inconsistent with your normal communication style unethical? In other words, are you being a fake?

Questions to Consider

1. Are there situations where "faking it" might be ethical and other situations where it might be unethical? If it depends on the situation, when would it be ethical, and when would it be unethical?

2. If you have ever been in such a situation, what decision did you make, and why?

additional touch or no touch at all? How far were you standing from one another? Did you maintain eye contact? What were you wearing? Did you take turns talking, or did you talk at the same time? How did you refer to one another? What did you talk about? Did the physical setting affect what was discussed? How was the conversation brought to a close? What happened at the end? Your answers to these questions are based partly on cultural expectations.

When you follow these cultural expectations, you are also reinforcing them. Their position as the "proper" way to do things has been strengthened. Cultural expectations are also reinforced when someone violates them. Consider the most recent experience when you or someone else did something embarrassing. It was probably embarrassing because cultural expectations had been violated. Or, if there was no touch in your most recent face-to-face conversation, what would have happened if you had touched the other person? If touching would have been inappropriate, then the other person may have responded in a negative manner—enforcing cultural expectations.

Communication Is Relational

As mentioned previously, communication and relationships are intertwined. Communication affects relationships, and relationships affect communication. The ways in which communication and relationships are connected are fully explored throughout the book. For now, it is important to recognize that relationships are assumed each time you communicate with someone.

Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson (1967) originally put it a little differently, suggesting that whenever you communicate with someone, you relate to him or her at the same time. All communication contains both a content (message) level and a relational level, which means that, as well as conveying information, every message indicates how the sender of a message and the receiver of that message are socially and personally related.

Sometimes the relational connection between sender and receiver is obvious, such as when formal relational terms (e.g., *dad*) or terms unique to a relationship (e.g., *sweetie* or *stinky*) are included.

Quite often, the relational connection between sender and receiver is less obvious. However, relational cues within communication enable you to determine, for instance, who is the boss and who is the employee. Yelling "Come into my office! Now!" indicates a status difference just through the *style* of the communication. Because the relationships between people often are not openly expressed but subtly indicated or taken for granted in most communication, the content and relational components of messages are not always easy to separate.

Exploring the relational characteristic of communication a bit further, it can be maintained that relationships create worlds of meaning for people through communication, and communication produces the same result for people through relationships. Group decision making, for example, is accomplished not just by the logic of arguments, agenda setting, and solution evaluations but also by group members' relationships with one another outside the group setting. Groups that meet to make decisions almost never come from nowhere, communicate, make a decision, and then go home. The members know one another, talk informally outside the group setting, and have personal likes and dislikes for one another that will affect their discussions about certain matters. Many decisions that appear to be made during an open discussion are actually sometimes tied up before the communication begins. Words have been whispered into ears, promises made, factions formed, and relationships displayed well in advance of any discussion.

Consider examples from your life. Is everyone equal in your family? How are your interactions with friends different from your interactions with enemies? Have you ever felt a connection to a character in a movie? On your last job interview, did the employer treat you like a potential valued colleague or an interchangeable worker? Are you more

likely to contact some people through text messages and less likely to contact other people through text messages? We examine these questions and more throughout the remainder of the book.

Communication Involves Frames

frame: a basic form of knowledge that provides a definition of a scenario, either because both people agree on the nature of the situation or because the cultural assumptions built into the interaction and the previous relational context of talk give them a clue

communication frame: a boundary around a conversation that pulls one's attention toward certain things and away from others

Communication is very complex, but the use of frames helps people make sense of things. **Frames** are basic forms of knowledge that provide a definition of a scenario, either because both people agree on the nature of the situation or because the cultural assumptions built into the interaction and the previous relational context of talk give them a clue (Wood & Duck, 2006). Think of the frame on a picture and how it pulls your attention into some elements (the picture) and excludes all the rest (the wall, the gallery, the furniture). In similar fashion, a **communication frame** draws a boundary around the conversation and pulls our attention toward certain things and away from others.

Coordinating Interactions

Frames help people understand their roles in a conversation and what is expected of them. Your understanding of the classroom frame will inform you of what you should do as a student and how you should interact with your instructor and with your classmates. A shared understanding of these frames is what enables people to make sense of what is taking place to coordinate their symbolic activities.

Assigning Meanings

People also use framing assumptions to make decisions about what symbols are used and how these symbols should be interpreted. Your relationships with others, for instance, influence how you assign meaning to their words. If someone says something insulting to you, and that person is a friend, you use that relational frame to recognize those words as being intended as a joke. If that person is an enemy, you use that particular relational frame to recognize those words as being intended as offensive.

Many conversations between close friends are "framed" by previous experiences and conversations—hence, the phrase *frame of reference*. In what ways can you deduce that these men are friends and that they therefore share some history together that frames their interaction?
Thomas Barwick/Digital Vision/Getty Images

Perspectives

Communication frames are based partly on a person's perspectives of situations and relationships with others. These frames of perspective will greatly influence the coordinating of interactions and the assigning of meaning discussed earlier. They also explain why people do not always agree on what exactly is taking place.

Consider how instructors and students do not always frame situations and their relationships in the same way. For instance, when a student asks an instructor for an extension on an assignment, a number of factors influence how both approach that interaction. A student may be considering personal demands at home, at work, and in other classes as valid reasons an extension should be granted. An instructor may be considering fairness to other students, maintaining accountability, and personal schedule constraints as reasons an extension should not be granted. A student may perceive the instructor as unwilling to provide an extension simply because he or she is mean or on a power trip. An instructor may perceive a student as simply being uncaring and lazy, which explains why the assignment could not be completed on time. A student may see himself or herself as a consumer paying for an education and expect instructors to satisfy his or her every whim. (Do not get us started on this one!) An

instructor may view students more like clients—sometimes a person must tell clients things they do not want to hear. These are just a few examples of perspectives being used to frame an interaction. They certainly do not represent all perspectives, and some perspectives may be the total opposite of those presented here. Still, it gives you some idea about how a person's perspectives will influence communication frames being used during an interaction.

Communication Is Both Presentational and Representational

Another characteristic of communication is that it is both representational and presen-tational. Accordingly, although communication normally describes facts or conveys information (**representation**), it also presents your particular version of the facts or events (**presentation**). Communication is never neutral. It always conveys the perspec-tive or worldview of the person sending a message. Your communication with other people *presents* them with a way of looking at the world that is based on how you prefer them to see it.

At first glance, the notion of communication being both presentational and rep-resentational is difficult to grasp. Consider the following way of looking at this issue: When you speak to someone, you have a number of words—your entire vocabulary—that can be used to construct your message. You will choose some words to construct the message and not choose other words. You will arrange those words chosen in cer-tain ways and not in other ways. Your selection of words and the arrangement of those words are meaningful acts. For instance, two different perspectives concerning people in the United States unlawfully are presented through using either the term *undocumented worker* or the term *illegal alien.* Your use of words and your construction of messages do not just represent ideas and information; your use of words presents your view of the world to others.

On some occasions, the presentation of these views is carefully developed. For example, imagine or recall a situation in which a friend has questioned something you have done, but you believed your actions were justified and wanted to explain this justification to your friend. In such cases, you would likely select your words very carefully and thoughtfully, wanting your friend to view the situation from your perspective. Your message is conveying information (representational) while providing a glimpse into your perspective and how you want your friend to view the situation (presentational).

On other occasions, the selection of words may not be carefully planned but neverthe-less presents your perspective to others. Each time someone communicates, a worldview

representation: describes facts or conveys information (contrast with *presentation*)

presentation: one person's particular version of, or "take" on, the facts or events (contrast with *representation*)

is being shared through the selection of terms, regardless of how much thought has gone into the construction of a message. Someone saying "I suppose I should probably go to work now" in a gloomy manner provides a glimpse into how that person views his or her job—presumably not favorably. Someone saying "I get to go to my communication class now" in an understandably excited manner provides a glimpse into how that person views the course—presumably very favorably.

Communication Is a Transaction

The transactional nature of communication is the final characteristic we will address in this chapter. When addressing communication as a transaction, though, we first must address two other common ways of thinking about communication: communication as action and communication as interaction. As seen in Figure 1.1, each way of thinking about communication assumes something different about how communication works, with communication as transaction being the more sophisticated and more fruitful way of thinking about communication.

Communication as Action

Communication as action is simply the act of a sender sending a message to a receiver. Communication as *action* occurs when someone leaves a message on your voice mail, sends you an e-mail, or puts a message in a bottle in the ocean—that is, when someone transmits a message. So if Emalyn sends a text message to Corban, communication has occurred. It is pretty simple, really. However, it is not too interesting. If action were all there was to communication, we would be studying something else and not

Would sending a text message be considered an act, an interaction, or a transaction?
iStock.com/JRLPhotographer

communication as action: the act of sending messages—whether or not they are received

FIGURE 1.1 ● Communication as Action, Interaction, and Transaction

ACTION
Sender — A message is sent → Receiver

INTERACTION
Sender (Receiver) ← Messages are exchanged → Receiver (Sender)

TRANSACTION
Sender/Receiver ⇄ Receiver/Sender

Messages are exchanged, possibly simultaneously, resulting in the development of meaning and the creation of something new
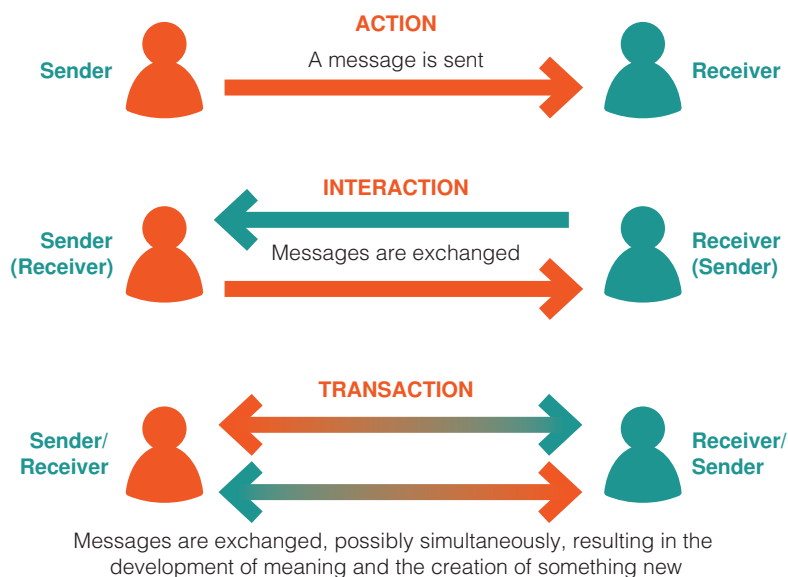
writing books about it. Communication as action could be developed slightly by questioning whether someone must *receive* a message for it to be communication. What if Corban does not check his text messages? Has communication truly occurred? That is about as far as we can take things, though. If communication were only an action, then there would really be no need to study it.

Communication as Interaction

Communication as interaction counts something as communication only if there is an exchange of information. In this much more typical perception of communication, someone sends a message that is received by someone who in turn sends a message back to the original sender. Using the previous example, communication takes place if Emalyn sends Corban a text, Corban receives the text from Emalyn, and Corban then sends a reply to Emalyn. Although this view of communication is slightly more advanced than communication as action, it remains limited in its scope and fails to capture what truly happens when people communicate.

communication as interaction: an exchange of information between two (or more) individuals

Communication as Transaction

A more accurate and interesting way to see communication is **communication as transaction**, or the construction of shared meanings or understandings. For example, communication exists between Emalyn and Corban if, through their texts, they both arrive at the shared realization that they understand/know/love/need each other. In other words, communication in this sense is more than the mere exchange of symbols. The speakers get more out of it, and extra meanings are communicated above and beyond the content of the messages exchanged.

communication as transaction: the construction of shared meanings or understandings between two (or more) individuals

Communication is interesting and worthy of study not because it merely involves the exchange of messages but because something magical and extra happens in this process. Two people speak, and trust is built (transacted); two people touch one another, and love is realized (transacted); two people argue, and power is exerted (transacted); a man holds the door open for a woman, and either sexist stereotyping or politeness is transacted. In all cases, the communication message transacts or constitutes something above and beyond the symbols being exchanged.

If that is not enough reason to study communication, there is even more to consider. Communication does not just create meaning; it creates the stuff of life. This **constitutive approach to communication** maintains that communication creates or brings into existence something that has not been there before. From this point of view, communication does not just construct meanings. Through communication, relationships are created, cultures are created, genders are created, ethnicities are created, sexualities are created, and even realities are created. These are created through communication and maintained, negotiated, challenged, and altered through communication.

constitutive approach to communication: communication can create or bring into existence something that has not been there before, such as an agreement, a contract, or an identity

For instance, relationships are not locations that we suddenly jump into—even though people refer to being *in* a relationship. Instead, relationships are quite literally talked into existence. Through communication—especially words, but also nonverbal communication—relationships are brought into being, and through communication the maintenance, negotiation, challenges, and alterations of relationships occur.

So, returning to the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, there does not appear to be any part of life that does not involve communication. Communication serves as the actual foundation for most of our life experiences. This fascinating area of study provides a great deal of enjoyment and comes with continuous transformation and paths to explore. Those are some of the reasons we study communication. We are glad that you are joining us.

Learning Outcomes Revisited

1. **Explain how communication is symbolic.**

   Symbols are arbitrarily selected representations of something with no direct connection to that which they represent. Though sometimes used interchangeably, the terms *symbol* and *sign* do not describe the same thing. Signs are consequences or indicators of something specific, which human beings cannot change by their arbitrary actions or labels.

2. **Explain how meaning is established.**

   Because they are completely arbitrary, symbols have the potential for multiple meanings that are subject to change. The meaning assigned to a symbol has been socially constructed and is contingent on the contexts (physical, relational, situational) in which the symbol is used and other symbolic activity (verbal and nonverbal), as well as on the medium used to transmit it.

3. **Explain how communication is cultural.**

   Culture influences communication, and communication creates and reinforces these cultural influences. Each time someone communicates, he or she is taking knowledge for granted, doing what his or her culture expects, and treating people in ways the culture acknowledges. Culture is accomplished, performed, and enacted through communication.

4. **Explain how communication is relational.**

   All communication contains both a content (message) level and a relational level, which means that, as well as conveying information, every message indicates how the sender of a message and the receiver of that message are socially and personally related. Communication and relationships are intertwined. Communication affects relationships, and relationships affect communication.

5. **Explain the use of communication frames.**

   Communication frames are basic forms of knowledge that provide a definition of a scenario, either because both people agree on the nature of the situation or because the cultural assumptions built into the interaction and the previous relational context of talk give them a clue. A communication frame draws a boundary around the conversation and pulls our attention toward certain things and away from others. Frames help people understand their role in a conversation and what is expected of them. People also use framing assumptions to make decisions about what symbols are used and how these symbols should be interpreted.

6. **Explain what it means to view communication as both representational and presentational.**

   Communication describes facts or conveys information (representation) while conveying the perspective or worldview or slant of the person sending a message (presentation). Communication gives other people and audiences a way of looking at the world that is based on how the source of a message prefers them to see it.

7. **Explain what it means to view communication as a transaction.**

   Viewing communication as a transaction means understanding that communication is more than just the simple exchange of messages. Rather, communication involves the construction of shared meanings or understandings between two (or more) individuals. Moreover, communication constitutes, or creates, aspects of life such as relationships, culture, gender, and even reality.

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Communication and You

1. Communicating by using words, terms, and knowledge shared by other people can include them in a conversation. At the same time, doing so can exclude individuals who lack that shared understanding. Describe situations when you have encountered these instances. When would you consider each instance to be appropriate, and when would you consider each instance to be inappropriate?

2. Your communication with someone may appeal to certain relational obligations. For instance, friends may be expected to do certain things if they are truly friends—"Come on, be a friend and help me move this weekend." Describe situations when such appeals have been done, with friends but also romantic partners and family members. Why do you think such appeals work?

3. Frames provide you with additional context and information in any communication interaction. Think back to a recent conversation with someone. What might you and the other person have said to frame the interaction?

Technology Connections

1. Locate examples of internet activism. What do you think is most effective and least effective about the strategies used in the examples located?

2. In Japanese, there are more than 200 ways for one person to address another according to protocols of respect and status differences recognized by the participants. In English and other languages, there may not be that many, but multiple forms of address are still used to show respect and recognize status difference. Is it as important to acknowledge status and show respect when communicating with people on the internet as it is when communicating with them face-to-face?

3. *Communication apprehension* is the technical term used for the fear or anxiety you might experience when faced with communicating in situations that make you uncomfortable. Some people are anxious when answering a question posed in the classroom. Other people are uncomfortable contributing to small group discussions. For most people, delivering a presentation is something that makes them quite anxious. Are you more or less comfortable talking with someone through text or instant messaging as compared with face-to-face or video chat such as FaceTime? Does it matter with whom you are talking or the topic of conversation? What do you think the reasons are for your answers?

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Communication Skills

2

Identities, Perceptions, and Communication

Did you know that you develop multiple identities throughout the day? Before making an appointment for a psychological evaluation, recognize that we are not talking about a medical disorder. Everyone constructs multiple identities as part of his or her everyday relational life. Consider the many relational roles a person establishes in everyday life. A person may at once be a friend, sibling, parent, and child. That same person may be a student, coworker, supervisor, or customer. Within these various roles, when interacting with different people and in different contexts, a person may be passive, strict,

> ### Learning Outcomes
>
> After reading this chapter, you will be able to:
>
> 1. Explain the basic assumptions of identity construction.
> 2. Explain the processes of perceptions.
> 3. Explain how identities are transacted through communication and performance.
> 4. Explain how identities are transacted though self-disclosure.
> 5. Explain how identities are transacted in connection with other people.

caring, detached, feminine, or masculine. That same person may end the day cheering for a sports team in a group of die-hard fans or taking part in an online discussion about a favorite web series. Each of these aspects of daily experience requires the development of a different identity.

Identities can be defined as symbolic creations based on the performance of personal roles, how people perceive themselves, and how people want to be viewed by others. Sorts of identities might include personal identities (kind, mean, hardworking, lazy, fan of musicals), relational identities (parent, child, friend, enemy), social identities (customer, employee, supervisor), and demographic identities (biological sex, race, sexual orientation, place of origin, age, socioeconomic status).

The presence of identity work influences the communication that takes place during an interaction. Our relationships with others are also greatly influenced by identities. Accordingly, greater awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of identities will assist you as you develop communication and relational understanding and skills.

The notion of identities as symbolic creations may be new to you, especially since it is common to think of an identity as something within a person. In fact, people's actions are sometimes explained by saying, "That is just who they are." However, people do not possess a core, unchanging self that drives their behavior and is just waiting to be revealed to others. In fact, there is a great deal to unpack and explain when it comes to identities. Fortunately, we have an entire chapter to do it!

You may have very perceptively noticed that the word *perceive* is included in the chapter title and the definition of *identities*. The creation and maintenance of identities are guided partly through perceptions of oneself, other people, and situations. **Perception** involves how a person views the world, organizes what is perceived, interprets information, and evaluates information—all of which will influence symbolic activity. It is therefore important to include such material in discussions of identity.

In what follows, we will provide key ideas about identities. We will then turn our attention to perceptions, explore the creation and development of identities through communication, and finally examine how other people's activities influence identity creation.

identities: symbolic creations based on the performance of personal roles, how people perceive themselves, and how people want to be viewed by others

perception: process of actively selecting, organizing, interpreting, and evaluating information, activities, situations, people, and essentially all the things that make up your world

Basic Assumptions of Identity Creation

We will begin by examining basic assumptions of identity creation. Doing so will assist in better understanding what you might find to be a novel way of thinking about identities. We will lead with a big misconception—that people have a core self.

Myth of the Core Self

First, people do not possess core, unchanging selves that influence actions and are waiting to be disclosed. Having said that, people develop and possess core values and beliefs, and we are certainly not arguing against religious or spiritual beliefs about personhood. Additionally, people's particular biological makeup and physical characteristics can influence the way they communicate with others and—probably more so—the way others communicate with them. Even with these characteristics, people construct multiple, sometimes contradictory, identities through communication with others.

A general idea does exist that people are who they are, however. As mentioned, when describing other people's actions, someone might say, "That is just who they are." And, more than one website clickbait ad promises to expose the real Lady Gaga, PewDiePie, or other celebrity. The truth is that a core self does not exist. Because of the common assumption that one does, though, we will spend some time challenging this idea in just a bit.

Different Moods

You may feel outgoing and confident some days and communicate with others accordingly. Other days, you may feel more reserved and insecure, and this is reflected in your communication with others. People can get in a lousy mood as a result of periodic hormonal imbalances, gluten intolerance, or just a series of really unfortunate events happening to them on a bad hair day. People can also get in a good mood after talking with a good friend, getting a good parking spot, or earning an A on their communication exam. If people had a core self, they would feel the same way, maintain the same mood, and communicate accordingly all the time. However, that is not the case.

Different Situations

A person may be unfriendly and distant at school but funny and sociable at work. This person may be more confident and comfortable at work than at school. Or this person may have yet to make friends at school with whom he or she can interact in a sociable manner. It is also possible that this person views his or her time at school as serious business, and he or she wants to remain focused. Whatever the case may be, the point is the same. People transact multiple identities given different situations and different areas of their lives.

Different Relationships

People also transact multiple identities given the many different relationships shared with others. You may act one way around your friends and an entirely different way around your relatives. Different relational identities are constructed based on the relationships being transacted. Once again, if people had an unchanging core self, there would be no change in communication and behavior around different people. However, this change takes place, occasionally in dramatic ways.

Different Evaluations

Sometimes people evaluate the same person in vastly different ways. For instance, you may know someone whom you view as kind, yet one of your friends sees the person as nasty. Or two professors may argue about whether a particular student is intelligent or stands no chance of improving. If every person had just one identity at the core of his or her personality and everyone perceived it identically, then these competing evaluations would make no sense. Yet such varying evaluations of people happen quite frequently.

Sometimes even a single person will evaluate another person in vastly different ways. If people really had a stable core inside a set of layers that we could peel away to reach "the