

# Experience Communication

Third Edition

Mc  
Graw  
Hill





EXPERIENCE COMMUNICATION, THIRD EDITION

Published by McGraw Hill LLC, 1325 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019. Copyright ©2023 by McGraw Hill LLC. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Previous editions ©2019 and 2015. No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written consent of McGraw Hill LLC, including, but not limited to, in any network or other electronic storage or transmission, or broadcast for distance learning.

Some ancillaries, including electronic and print components, may not be available to customers outside the United States.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 LCR 27 26 25 24 23 22

ISBN 978-1-264-10773-5 (bound edition)  
MHID 1-264-10773-0 (bound edition)  
ISBN 978-1-264-38225-5 (loose-leaf edition)  
MHID 1-264-38225-1 (loose-leaf edition)

Executive Portfolio Manager: *Sarah Remington*  
Product Development Manager: *Dawn Groundwater*  
Executive Marketing Manager: *Kate Stewart*  
Lead Content Project Manager: *Sandy Wille*  
Senior Content Project Manager: *George Theofanopoulos*  
Buyer: *Rachel Hirschfield*  
Designer: *Beth Blech*  
Content Licensing Specialist: *Sarah Flynn*  
Cover Image: *Busakorn Pongparnit/Moment/Getty Images*  
Compositor: *Aptara, Inc.*

All credits appearing on page or at the end of the book are considered to be an extension of the copyright page.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Jeffrey T. Child, author.  
Title: Experience communication / Jeffrey T. Child.  
Description: Third edition. | New York, NY : McGraw Hill Education, [2022]  
| Includes bibliographical references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2021028930 (print) | LCCN 2021028931 (ebook) | ISBN 9781264107735 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781264382255 (spiral bound) | ISBN 9781264382224 (ebook)  
Subjects: LCSH: Communication—Study and teaching (Higher) | Communication in education.  
Classification: LCC P91.3 .C45 2022 (print) | LCC P91.3 (ebook) | DDC 302.2/0711—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021028930>  
LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021028931>

The Internet addresses listed in the text were accurate at the time of publication. The inclusion of a website does not indicate an endorsement by the authors or McGraw Hill LLC, and McGraw Hill LLC does not guarantee the accuracy of the information presented at these sites.

[mheducation.com/highered](https://mheducation.com/highered)

## About the Author

Jeffrey T. Child is Professor of Communication at Kent State University, where he teaches Family Communication, Advanced Interpersonal Communication, Communication Research Methods, High Impact Speaking, College Teaching and Communication, and Communication, Uncertainty, and Privacy Management. His primary area of research is in exploring privacy management practices across various communication contexts. He received his Ph.D. in Communication from North Dakota State University and a Bachelor of Science in Speech Communication from Wayne State College. He was editor of the *Journal of Family Communication*.



Permission granted by Robert Christy, coordinator of photography,  
Kent State University

Author Jeffrey T. Child.



# Preface

*Experience Communication* meets students where they are by foregrounding the core principles of effective communication and encouraging practical applications across scenarios relevant to their everyday lives.

Today's students are navigating a world in which the majority of their personal and professional interactions happen over mediated channels, whether through social media, web conferencing software, or distance learning tools. *Experience Communication* offers an accessible and relatable program built to address the skills students need to communicate effectively in the classroom, online, and in the workplace.

## MCGRAW HILL CONNECT: AN OVERVIEW

Written for today's digital native student, *Experience Communication* teaches the fundamentals of successful communication in an increasingly global environment. Focused on providing students with ample opportunities to build their communication skills, *Experience Communication* motivates students to confidently use these skills to represent themselves effectively in person and online.

McGraw Hill Connect offers full-semester access to comprehensive, reliable content and learning resources for the Introduction to Communication course. Connect's deep integration with most learning management systems (LMS), including Blackboard and Desire2Learn (D2L), offers single sign-on and grade book synchronization. Data from Assignment Results reports synchronize directly with many LMS, allowing scores to flow automatically from Connect into school-specific grade books, if required.

When you assign **Connect** you can be confident—and have data to demonstrate—that your students, however diverse, are acquiring the skills, principles, and critical processes that constitute effective communication. This leaves you to focus on your highest course expectations.

**Tailored to you.** **Connect** offers on-demand, single sign-on access to learners—wherever they are and whenever they have time. With a single, one-time registration, learners receive access to McGraw Hill's trusted content. Learners also have a courtesy trial period during registration.

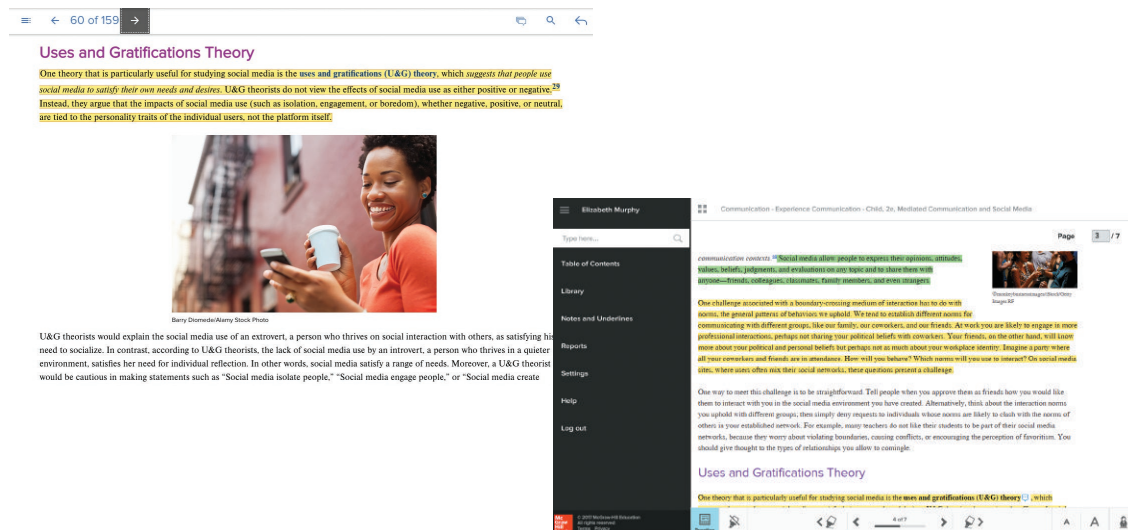
**Easy to use.** **Connect** seamlessly supports all major learning management systems with content, assignments, performance data, and SmartBook 2.0, the leading adaptive learning system. With these tools, you can quickly make assignments, produce reports, focus discussions, intervene on problem topics, and help at-risk learners—as you need to and when you need to.

## Experience Communication SmartBook 2.0

**A personalized and adaptive learning experience with SmartBook 2.0.** Boost learner success with McGraw Hill's adaptive reading and study experience. The *Experience Communication* SmartBook 2.0 highlights the most impactful communication concepts the learner needs to study at that moment in time. The learning path continuously adapts and, based on what the individual learner knows and does not know, provides focused help through targeted assessments and Learning Resources.

**Enhanced for the new edition!** With a suite of new learning resources and question probes, as well as highlights of key chapter concepts, SmartBook's intuitive technology optimizes student study time by creating a personalized learning path for improved course performance and overall student success.

SmartBook 2.0 highlights the key concepts of every chapter, offering the student a high-impact learning experience (left). Here, highlighted text and an illustration together explain a theory for why people use social media.



**Uses and Gratifications Theory**

One theory that is particularly useful for studying social media is the **uses and gratifications (U&G) theory**, which suggests that people use social media to satisfy their own needs and desires. U&G theorists do not view the effects of social media use as either positive or negative.<sup>29</sup> Instead, they argue that the impacts of social media use (such as isolation, engagement, or boredom), whether negative, positive, or neutral, are tied to the personality traits of the individual users, not the platform itself.

U&G theorists would explain the social media use of an extrovert, a person who thrives on social interaction with others, as satisfying his need to socialize. In contrast, according to U&G theorists, the lack of social media use by an introvert, a person who thrives in a quieter environment, satisfies her need for individual reflection. In other words, social media satisfy a range of needs. Moreover, a U&G theorist would be cautious in making statements such as "Social media isolate people," "Social media engage people," or "Social media create

**Hundreds of interactive learning resources.** Presented in a range of interactive styles, *Experience Communication* Learning Resources support students who may be struggling to master, or simply wish to review, the most important communication concepts. Designed to reinforce the most important chapter concepts, every Learning Resource is presented at the precise moment of need. Whether video, audio clip, or interactive mini-lesson, each of the 300-plus Learning Resources was designed to give students a lifelong foundation in strong communication skills.



**More than 800 targeted assessments.** Class-tested at colleges and universities nationwide, a collection of engaging question probes—new and revised, more than 800 in all—give learners the information on the introductory communication concepts they need to know, at every stage of the learning process, in order to thrive in the course. Designed to gauge learner’s comprehension of the most important *Experience Communication* chapter concepts, and presented in a variety of interactive styles to facilitate student engagement, targeted assessments give students immediate feedback on their understanding of the text. Each question probe identifies a learner’s familiarity with the instruction and points to areas where additional remediation is needed.

Your Answer Correct

The body's reaction to any type of perceived threat is called

☐ physically

☒ stress

☐ anxiety

☐ fight-or-flight

Reason:

This is a popular syndrome based on what we as humans do when under stress.

Correct Answer

stress.

Rate your confidence to submit your answer

High

Medium

Low

VIEW

Your Answer Correct

You travel on business to a country where you become frustrated by people being consistently late to meetings. However, the meetings tend to be very productive because they are not distracted by other commitments once they arrive. This would be characteristic of a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ culture.

☐ individualistic

☒ P-time

☐ M-time

☐ uncertainty-avoidance culture

Reason:

Nothing in the scenario suggests that the people have an individualistic outlook.

Reason:

In a P-time, or polychronic, culture there is less concern for schedules and more focus on personal interactions.

Reason:

In an M-time, or monochronic, culture there is greater concern for schedules and being on time.


Reason:

Nothing in the scenario suggests that the people seek uncertainty-avoidance.


Correct Answer

P-time

**Skills-focused.** Whether communicating with their peers, their loved ones, their colleagues, or their communities, students must continually adapt and build on their communication skills. This edition of *Experience Communication* includes a variety of boxed features to support students in developing these skills and applying them to their lives.



**Skill Builder** boxes encourage students to practice key communication skills, such as neutralizing defensiveness in everyday communication and analyzing their social media presence. This feature offers a wealth of practical applications for real-life communication scenarios.



**New to this edition! Communication in Action** boxes take the skill-building approach one step further, presenting the reflections of actual students who describe their experiences putting the chapter concepts in practice in their own lives.

vi

Preface

chi07730\_fm\_i-xxii.indd 6

11/10/21 9:58 AM



**Connecting Globally** boxes discuss the ways in which, in an increasingly global world, computer-mediated communication facilitates opportunities for intercultural awareness and exchange. Throughout the chapters, these boxes cover topics highlighting this intersection and teach students to be more adaptable in their communication styles.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE RESPONSES.** Writing Assignments offer faculty the ability to assign a full range of writing assignments to students (both manual-scoring and auto-scoring) with just-in-time feedback. You may set up manually scored assignments in a way that students can

- automatically receive grammar and high-level feedback to improve their writing before they submit a project to you;
- run originality checks and receive feedback on “exact matches” and “possibly altered text” that includes guidance about how to properly paraphrase, quote, and cite sources to improve the academic integrity of their writing before they submit their work to you.

The new writing assignments will also have features that allow instructors to assign milestone drafts (optional), easily re-use your text and audio comments, build/score with your rubric, and view your own originality report of student’s final submission.

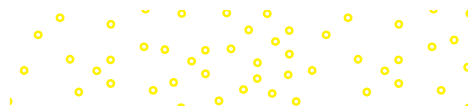
**A SUITE OF APPLICATION-BASED ACTIVITIES.** At the higher level of Bloom’s, McGraw Hill’s Application-Based Activities are highly interactive, automatically graded, online learn-by-doing exercises that provide students a safe space to apply their knowledge and problem-solving skills to real-world scenarios. Each scenario addresses key concepts that students must use to work through to solve communication problems, resulting in improved critical thinking and development of relevant skills.

### Video Capture Powered by GoReact

With just a smartphone, tablet, or webcam, students and instructors can capture video of presentations with ease. Video Capture Powered by GoReact, fully integrated in McGraw Hill’s Connect platform, does not require any extra equipment or complicated training. Create your own custom Video Capture assignment, including in-class and online speeches and presentations, self-review, and peer review.

With our customizable rubrics, time-coded comments, and visual markers, students will see feedback at exactly the right moment, and in context, to help improve their speaking and presentation skills and confidence.

- The Video Capture tool allows instructors to easily and efficiently set up speech assignments for their course that can easily be shared and repurposed, as needed.





- Customizable rubrics and settings can be saved and shared, saving time and streamlining the speech assignment process.
- Allows both students and instructors to view videos during the assessment process. Feedback can be left within a customized rubric or as time-stamped comments within the video-playback itself.

## Instructor Reports

Instructor Reports allow instructors to quickly monitor learner activity, making it easy to identify which learners are struggling and to provide immediate help to ensure those learners stay enrolled in the course and improve their performance. The Instructor Reports also highlight the concepts and learning objectives that the class as a whole is having difficulty grasping. This essential information lets you know exactly which areas to target for review during your limited class time.

Some key reports include:

**Progress Overview report**—View learner progress for all modules, including how long learners have spent working in the module, which modules they have used outside of any that were assigned, and individual learner progress.

**Missed Questions report**—Identify specific assessments, organized by chapter, that are problematic for learners.

**Most Challenging Learning Objectives report**—Identify the specific topic areas that are challenging for your learners; these reports are organized by chapter and include specific page references. Use this information to tailor your lecture time and assignments to cover areas that require additional remediation and practice.

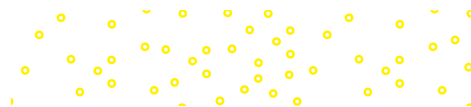
**Metacognitive Skills report**—View statistics showing how knowledgeable your learners are about their own comprehension and learning.

## Classroom Preparation Tools

Whether before, during, or after class, there is a suite of *Experience Communication* products designed to help instructors plan their lessons and to keep students building upon the foundations of the course.

**Accessible PowerPoint Slides.** The accessible PowerPoint presentations for *Experience Communication* provide chapter highlights that help instructors create focused yet individualized lesson plans.

**Test Bank and Test Builder.** The *Experience Communication* Test Bank offers multiple choice questions, true/false questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, and essay questions for each chapter. New to this edition and available within Connect, Test Builder is a cloud-based tool that enables instructors to format tests that can be printed and administered within a Learning Management System. Test Builder offers a modern, streamlined interface for easy content





configuration that matches course needs, without requiring a download. Test Builder enables instructors to:

- Access all test bank content from a particular title
- Easily pinpoint the most relevant content through robust filtering options
- Manipulate the order of questions or scramble questions and/or answers
- Pin questions to a specific location within a test
- Determine the preferred treatment of algorithmic questions
- Choose the layout and spacing
- Add instructions and configure default settings

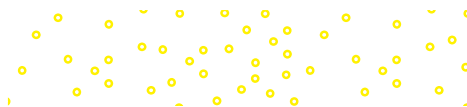
**Instructor's Manual.** Written by the author, this comprehensive guide to teaching from *Experience Communication* contains lecture suggestions and resources for each chapter.

### Support to Ensure Success

- **Support at Every Step**—McGraw Hill's Support at Every Step site offers a wealth of training and course creation guidance for instructors and learners alike. Instructor support is presented in easy-to-navigate, easy-to-complete sections. It includes the popular Connect how-to videos, step-by-step guides, and other materials that explain how to use both the Connect platform and its course-specific tools and features. <https://www.mheducation.com/highered/support.html>
- **Implementation Consultant**—These specialists are dedicated to working online with instructors—one-on-one—to demonstrate how the Connect platform works and to help incorporate Connect into a customer's specific course design and syllabus. Contact your local McGraw Hill representative to learn more.
- **Digital Faculty Consultants**—Digital Faculty Consultants are experienced instructors who use Connect in their classroom. These instructors are available to offer suggestions, advice, and training about how best to use Connect in your class. To request a Digital Faculty Consultant to speak with, please e-mail your McGraw Hill learning technology consultant.

#### CONTACT OUR CUSTOMER SUPPORT TEAM

McGraw Hill is dedicated to supporting instructors and learners. To contact our customer support team, please call us at 800-331-5094 or visit us online at <http://mpss.mhhe.com/contact.php>



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE THIRD EDITION

### Chapter 1, Communication, Perception, and Your Life

- Coverage of self-image now includes guidance on intrapersonal communication and perception checking
- In a feature that is new to this edition, a Communication in Action box shares a reflection by a Visual Communication major who describes her own experience with engaging in perception checking
- Updated research and examples throughout

### Chapter 2, Communicating Verbally

- Expanded coverage of avoiding ageism in speech, including in a new Communication in Action feature by a Marketing major who recognizes her own past use of ageist language
- Refreshed examples throughout, including new examples of similes and words to avoid
- New coverage of the Power of Words focuses on how to use language in a powerful and provocative way, when appropriate

### Chapter 3, Communicating Nonverbally

- New Communication in Action feature by a Journalism and Mass Communication major who discusses paying attention to kinesics
- Updated Connecting Globally feature focuses on issues of privacy and security in an increasingly global world

### Chapter 4, Communicating Through Listening

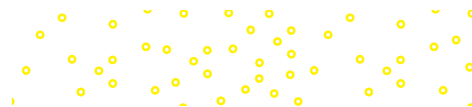
- New Communication in Action feature by a Business Management major who reflects on the relationship between listening and success

### Chapter 5, Interpersonal Communication

- New Connecting Globally feature asks students to consider the privacy implications of contact tracing efforts during a pandemic
- New Communication in Action feature by a Visual Communication Design major who reflects on her personal experience navigating the stages of ending a relationship
- New examples demonstrate the dark side of interpersonal relationships, taking on the topic of cyberbullying and its rise in recent years

### Chapter 6, Intercultural Communication

- Addresses the topic of immigration with updated data on countries with uncertainty-accepting vs. uncertainly-rejecting cultures
- Updated discussion and examples of prejudice and ethnocentrism in American society



### Chapter 7, Mediated Communication and Social Media

- Updated discussion of the influence of mass media on behavior accounts for our increased exposure to a variety of media, including new forms of social media
- Updated data on social media use and features, as well as expanded coverage of how social media facilitates gatekeeping and agenda setting
- Updated Skill Builder offers guidance on analyzing your social media presence

### Chapter 8, Organizational and Small-Group Communication

- New Communication in Action feature by an American Politics major who reflects on functions within small groups
- Updated Connecting Globally box considers issues of privacy in relation to video-conferencing software

### Chapter 9, Topic Selection and Audience Analysis

- Refreshed examples of evergreen topics, as well as topics that have a limited age
- New Communication in Action feature by an Urban Planning major who shares strategies for narrowing a topic
- Updated guidance on using social media to conduct audience analysis

### Chapter 10, Organizing Your Presentation

- New student sample outline exemplifies a rough draft of a speech on mental health on college campuses
- New Communication in Action feature by a Sports Administration major shares one student's helpful guidance for using notecards effectively leading up to and during a presentation

### Chapter 11, Gathering Information and Supporting Materials

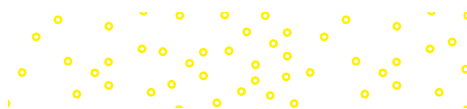
- New annotated Figure 11.5 walks students through a Google Scholar search for articles on the topic of food insecurity among college students
- Updated citation coverage and examples reflect APA 8th edition and MLA 9th edition guidelines

### Chapter 12, Communication Apprehension and Delivery

- Updated and expanded guidance on presenting effectively over video-conferencing software
- New Communication in Action feature explains how an Aeronautical Studies major uses the strategy of scanning and choosing across a variety of contexts

### Chapter 13, Public Presentations to Inform

- New professional excerpt of writing that uses description and vivid imagery to inform an audience



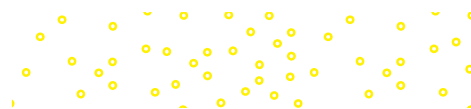
- Entirely new section on Effective Use of Visual Resources in a speech to inform
- New student examples of a complete-sentence outline and accompanying notecards for an informative speech on the cost of prescription drugs

#### **Chapter 14, Public Presentations to Persuade**

- New Table 14.1 compares examples of goals for propositions of fact, value, and policy on the topic of student debt
- Entirely new section offers guidance for engaging in ethical persuasion
- New Communication in Action feature by an Integrative Studies major who reflects on using rhetorical appeals to persuade
- New student example of a complete-sentence outline and accompanying notecards for a persuasive group presentation on mental health challenges on campuses during COVID-19

#### **Chapter 15, Using Communication Skills as You Enter the Workplace**

- Updated data in Figure 15.1 show which skills are most commonly sought by employers
- Updated list of top ten attributes employers look for on a résumé, in Figure 15.5
- Updated guidance on dressing professionally for job interviews
- New Communication in Action feature by Long-Term Care Administration major who reflects on how she used behavioral-based interview questions to screen candidates for a nursing position



# Acknowledgments

We thank the many instructors across the country who offered insights and suggestions to improve the quality of the instructional material and student experience throughout the entire *Experience Communication* program:

Lawerence Albert <i>Morehead State University</i>	Dawn Esser <i>Southwestern Iowa Community College</i>
Ashley Alfaro <i>Tarrant County College Southeast</i>	Emilie Falc <i>Winona State University</i>
Ennis Allen <i>Prince Georges Community College</i>	Robert Fussell <i>Guilford Technical Community College–Jamestown</i>
Emily Anzicek <i>Bowling Green State University</i>	Angela Gibson <i>Shelton State Community College</i>
Len Assante <i>Volunteer State Community College</i>	Jessica Gleason <i>Gateway Technical–Kenosha</i>
Rachelle Biderman <i>Hawkeye Community College</i>	LaKresha Graham <i>Rockhurst University</i>
Tonya Blivens <i>Tarrant County College Southeast</i>	Luke Green <i>Saint Cloud Technical and Community College</i>
Derek Bolen <i>Angelo State University</i>	Marisa Hamilton <i>Jefferson State Community College–Birmingham</i>
Kathy Brady <i>University of Wisconsin Whitewater</i>	Douglas Hoehn <i>Bergen Community College</i>
Ellen Bremen <i>Highline Community College</i>	Kent Hoggatt <i>Rochester University</i>
Braze Brickwedel <i>Tallahassee Community College</i>	Cheryl Hunter <i>NHTI Concord Community College</i>
Guy Bruno <i>Edison Community College</i>	Lora Hutson <i>Rochester University</i>
Amy Bryant <i>Nashville State Community College</i>	Robert Kagan <i>Central Connecticut State University</i>
Christy Burns <i>Jacksonville State University</i>	Linda Kalfayan <i>Westchester Community College</i>
Aaron Burtch <i>Lipscomb University</i>	Brian Kline <i>University of North Georgia–Gainesville</i>
Michael Caudill <i>Western Carolina University</i>	Charles Korn <i>Nova Community College–Manassas</i>
Jason Chapa <i>South Texas College</i>	Benjamin Krueger <i>Winona State University</i>
Virginia Chapman <i>Anderson University</i>	Shari Lendy <i>College of DuPage</i>
John (Shiao-Yun) Chiang <i>State University College–Oneonta</i>	Amy Lenoe <i>Naugatuck Valley Community College</i>
Kevin Clark <i>Austin Community College</i>	Darren Linvill <i>Clemson University</i>
Sarah Clements <i>Pulaski Technical College</i>	Martin Machover <i>Rockland Community College</i>
Preston Coleman <i>University of North Georgia–Gainesville</i>	Lucas Messer <i>Scottsdale Community College</i>
Julie Copp <i>Saint Louis Community College–Flors Valley</i>	Shellie Michael <i>Volunteer State Community College</i>
Kelly Crue <i>Saint Cloud Technical and Community College</i>	Barbara Midence <i>Miami Dade College</i>
Shirley Crum <i>Coastal Carolina Community College</i>	Robert Mild <i>Fairmont State University</i>
Phil Dalton <i>Hofstra University</i>	Yolanda Mitchell <i>Pulaski Technical College</i>
William Davis <i>Westchester Community College</i>	Lauren Morgan <i>College of Dupage</i>
Jethro De Lisle <i>Tacoma Community College</i>	Jeffrey Nelson <i>Kent State Trumbull</i>
Allison DeStefano <i>Waubensee Community College</i>	Lee Ann Nelson <i>Saint Charles County Community College</i>
Nicolas Docan-Morgan <i>University of Wisconsin–La Crosse</i>	Thomas Notton <i>University of Wisconsin–Superior</i>
Natalie Dudchock <i>Jefferson State Community College</i>	Travice Baldwin Obas <i>Georgia Highlands College</i>
Allen Dutch <i>Georgia Highlands College</i>	Christie Oberste <i>Pulaski Technical College</i>

Tami Olds *Nova Community College–Loudoun*  
 Darren Osburn *Saint Charles County  
 Community College*  
 Lisa Packard *Gateway Technical–Kenosha*  
 Danielle Parsons *University of Rhode Island–  
 Kingston*  
 Lisa Pavia-Higel *East Central College*  
 Andrea Pearman *Tidewater Community  
 College–Virginia Beach*  
 Richard Pineda *University of Texas at El Paso*  
 Tom Preston *University of North Georgia–  
 Gainesville*  
 Marlene Preston *Virginia Technical*  
 Deborah Prickett *Jacksonville State University*  
 Shannon Proctor *Highline Community College*  
 Janice Ralya *Jefferson State Community College*  
 David Schrader *Oklahoma State University–  
 Stillwater Campus*

David K. Scott *Northeastern State University*  
 Natalie Shubert *Ohio University–Athens*  
 Karen Solliday *Gateway Technical–Kenosha*  
 Katherine Spina *Westchester Community  
 College*  
 Don Spitler *Pulaski Technical College*  
 Steve Stuglin *Georgia Highlands College*  
 Charlotte Toguchi *Kapiolani Community College*  
 Carrie Tomko *Kent State University*  
 Dana Trunnell *Prairie State College*  
 Curt VanGeison *Saint Charles Community  
 College*  
 Jason Walker *Salem University*  
 Halie Wenhold-Sinchak, *College of Dupage*  
 Joanne Williams *Olivet College*  
 James Wilson *Shelton State Community College*  
 Emily Workman *Guilford Technical Community  
 College–Jamestown*



# Brief Contents

PART **1**

Communication Basics

- 1** Communication, Perception, and Your Life 2
- 2** Communicating Verbally 22
- 3** Communicating Nonverbally 43
- 4** Communicating Through Listening 60

PART **2**

Communication Contexts

- 5** Interpersonal Communication 74
- 6** Intercultural Communication 99
- 7** Mediated Communication and Social Media 119
- 8** Organizational and Small-Group Communication 151

PART **3**

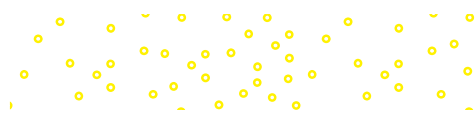
Public Speaking Basics

- 9** Topic Selection and Audience Analysis 182
- 10** Organizing Your Presentation 200
- 11** Gathering Information and Supporting Materials 222
- 12** Communication Apprehension and Delivery 248

PART **4**

Speaking to Inform and Persuade

- 13** Public Presentations to Inform 274
- 14** Public Presentations to Persuade 298
- 15** Using Communication Skills as You Enter the Workplace 326
- Glossary G-1
- Index I-1







# Contents

PART 1

Communication Basics

## 1 Communication, Perception, and Your Life 2

Why Study Communication?	3
What Is Communication?	4
The Components of Communication	6
People	6
The Message	6
The Channel	7
Feedback	7
Code	7
Encoding and Decoding	8
Noise	8
Three Models of Communication	9
Perception Affects Communication	10
What Is Perception?	10
What Occurs in Perception?	11
Differences in Perception	12
Physiological Features	12
Past Experiences	12
Roles	13
Present Feelings	13
Errors in Perception	13
Self-Image and Communication	15
Chapter Review	18

## 2 Communicating Verbally 22

The Functions of Verbal Communication	23
The Instrumental Function	23
The Creative Function	24
The Analytical Function	25
The Social Function	25
How Words Communicate	26
Two Processes for Interpreting Messages	27
Two Kinds of Meaning	27

The Rules of Verbal Communication	29
Rules Regarding Place	29
Rules Regarding Conversational Partners	29
Rules of Engagement	30
Words to Avoid	31
Profanity	32
Sexist Words	32
Racist Words	33
Ageist Words	33
Power of Words	34
Words to Use Carefully	35
Slang	35
Overused Expressions	35
Jargon	36
Words That Disguise	36
Strategies for Improving Your Verbal Communication	37
Ask, "What Did You Mean?"	37
Say It in Your Own Words	37
Describe Without Judgment	38
Define Your Terms	38
Build Your Vocabulary	38
Paint Pictures with Your Words	38
Make Accurate Observations	39
Make Inferences Carefully	39
Be Specific and Concrete	39
Use Figures of Speech	39
Use the Language of the Locals	39
Chapter Review	40

## 3 Communicating Nonverbally 43

What Is Nonverbal Communication?	44
How Are Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Related?	44
What Are Nonverbal Codes?	45
Bodily Movement and Facial Expression	46
Physical Attractiveness	47
Space	48
Time	50
Touch	50
Vocal Cues	51
Clothing and Other Artifacts	52

Why Are Nonverbal Codes Difficult to Interpret? 53

One Code Communicates a Variety of Meanings 53

A Variety of Codes Communicate the Same Meaning 54

How Can You Improve Your Nonverbal Communication? 54

*Chapter Review* 55

## 4 Communicating Through Listening 60

The Importance of Listening 61

Why Listen? 61

Hearing vs. Listening 63

Types of Listening 64

Listening to Discern Content and Intent 64

Listening for Learning 64

Listening for Relating 65

Listening for Pleasure 66

Attention and Listening 66

Attending and Focusing 66

Scanning and Choosing 67

Listening and Remembering 67

Barriers to Listening 68

*Chapter Review* 70

# PART 2 Communication Contexts

## 5 Interpersonal Communication 74

Defining Interpersonal Communication 75

The Changing Nature of Interpersonal Relationships 77

The Stages of Interpersonal Relationships 79

Relational Development 79

Relational Maintenance 82

Relational Deterioration 83

The Dark Side of Interpersonal Relationships 87

Improving Your Interpersonal Communication Behaviors 88

Using Affectionate and Supportive Communication 89

Influencing Others 89

Bargaining 90

Maintaining Behavioral Flexibility 91

The Healthy Interpersonal Relationship 92

*Chapter Review* 94

## 6 Intercultural Communication 99

Defining Intercultural Communication 100

Studying Intercultural Communication 104

Biases That Affect Intercultural Communication 106

Ethnocentrism 106

Stereotyping 107

Prejudice 108

Characteristics That Distinguish One Culture from Another 109

Individualistic vs. Collectivist Cultures 109

Uncertainty-Accepting vs. Uncertainty-Rejecting Cultures 110

Implicit-Rule vs. Explicit-Rule Cultures 111

M-Time vs. P-Time Cultures 112

Improving Intercultural and Co-Cultural Communication 114

*Chapter Review* 116

## 7 Mediated Communication and Social Media 119

Understanding Mediated Communication 120

Why Study Mediated Communication? 120

The Forms of Mediated Communication 122

Mass Communication and Mass Media 123

The Influence of Mass Media on Behavior 123

The Relationship Between Mass Media and Culture 125

Thinking Critically About Mass Media Messages 127

Computer-Mediated Communication and Social Media 128

The Features and Uses of Social Media 130

Uses and Gratifications Theory 132

Evaluating Your CMC Interactions 134

Thinking Critically About CMC Messages 135

Social Media Use Across Contexts 136

Interpersonal Communication 137

Organizational Communication 139

Public Relations and Crisis Communication 139

Journalism and News Reporting 140

Political Communication 140

Health Communication 141

Global Communication 141

Protecting and Presenting Yourself on Social Media 142

Managing Your Privacy Online 143

Presenting Yourself Online 145

Chapter Review 146

## 8 Organizational and Small-Group Communication 151

What Is Organizational Culture? 152

Investigating Organizational Culture 152

Understanding Organizational Structure 156

Analyzing Organizational Communication Practices 157

Communicating in Small Groups and Teams 159

Types of Small Groups 159

Norms and Roles in Small Groups 160

Group Climate and Cohesion 162

Decision Making and Problem Solving 166

Organizational Leadership 168

Communication Skills for Leaders 168

Types of Power and Leadership 169

Cultivating Positive Relationships in Small Groups 171

Interacting Effectively in Small Groups 172

Achieving Communication Competence 173

Managing Conflict 174

Preparing for Ethical Dilemmas 175

Chapter Review 178

## PART 3 Public Speaking Basics

### 9 Topic Selection and Audience Analysis 182

How to Select an Appropriate Topic 183

Survey Your Interests 183

Use Brainstorming 183

Assess Your Knowledge of and Commitment to the Topic 184

Determine Your Topic's Age 185

Narrow Your Topic 186

Audience Analysis 187

Three Levels of Audience Analysis 187

Four Methods of Audience Analysis 190

Tips for Analyzing Your Audience 195

Adapt to the Audience 195

Adapting Yourself 195

Adapting Your Language 196

Adapting Your Topic 196

Adapting Your Purpose and Thesis Statement 197

Chapter Review 198

### 10 Organizing Your Presentation 200

The Introduction 201

Gaining and Maintaining Audience Attention 202

Arousing Audience Interest 203

Stating the Purpose or Thesis 203

Establishing Your Qualifications 204

Forecasting Development and Organization 204

The Body 205

The Principles of Outlining 205

The Rough Draft 207

The Sentence Outline 208

The Key-Word Outline 210

Organizational Patterns 210

Transitions and Signposts 213

Tips for Using Note Cards 214

The Conclusion 215

The References 219

Chapter Review 220

### 11 Gathering Information and Supporting Materials 222

Gathering Information in a Digital World 223

Data, Information, and Knowledge 223

Information Literacy 224

Information Overload and Information Anxiety 225

The Information-Gathering Process 225

Gathering Information from Library Resources 228

Use Books, Articles, and Periodicals 228

Use Electronic Databases 231

Use Surveys and Statistics as Evidence 231

Gathering Information from the Internet	234
Use Search Engines and Virtual Libraries	234
Use Google Scholar	235
Use Internet Search Tools and Resources	237
Gathering Information Through Personal Experience and Independent Research	237
Experience Your Topic	238
Conduct Independent Research	239
Evaluating, Citing, and Documenting Your Sources	240
Evaluate Sources of Information	241
Avoid Plagiarism	241
Chapter Review	245

## 12 Communication Apprehension and Delivery 248

Why Care About Delivery Skills?	249
What Is Delivery?	249
What Is Communication Apprehension?	250
Experiencing Communication Apprehension	250
Reduce Your Fear of Public Speaking	252
Systematic Desensitization	252
Cognitive Restructuring	253
Skills Training	254
Choosing the Right Anxiety-Reducing Technique for You	255
The Four Modes of Delivery	257
The Extemporaneous Mode	257
The Impromptu Mode	258
The Manuscript Mode	258
The Memorized Mode	258
Choosing the Right Mode of Delivery for Your Presentation	259
The Vocal Aspects of Presentation	259
Projection and Volume	259
Rate	260
Pauses	260
Fluency	261
Pitch	261
Pronunciation	262
Articulation	263
Enunciation (Pronunciation Plus Articulation)	263
Vocal Variety	264

The Bodily Aspects of Presentation	264
Gestures	264
Facial Expressions	265
Eye Contact	265
Movement	267
Delivery Tips for Non-Native Speakers	269
Chapter Review	270

## PART 4 Speaking to Inform and Persuade

### 13 Public Presentations to Inform 274

Prepare an Informative Presentation	275
What Is Your Goal?	275
What Is Your Purpose?	276
Effectively Present Information to an Audience	276
Create Information Hunger	277
Demonstrate Information Relevance	278
Reveal Extrinsic Motivation	279
Design Informative Content	280
Avoid Information Overload	280
Organize Content	281
Skills for an Informative Presentation	282
Defining	283
Describing	283
Explaining	284
Illustrating	284
Using Analogies	285
Narrating	285
Demonstrating	286
Use Visual Resources to Inform	286
Effective Use of Visual Resources	287
Chapter Review	296

### 14 Public Presentations to Persuade 298

Prepare a Persuasive Presentation	299
What Is Your Immediate Purpose?	299
What Is Your Long-Range Goal?	300
Introduce Your Persuasive Presentation	300
Revealing the Purpose of the Presentation	300

What Purposes Are Persuasive?	301
Why Should You Try to Persuade?	301
Understand Persuasion	304
Using Argument to Persuade: Fact, Policy, and Value	304
What Is the Difference Between Evidence and Proof?	305
How Can You Test Evidence?	306
Engaging in Ethical Persuasion	308
Three Forms of Proof	309
Logos, or Logical Proof	309
Ethos, or Source Credibility	310
Pathos, or Emotional Proof	310
Organize Your Persuasive Message	312
The Monroe Motivated Sequence	312
Ethical Considerations	314
Skills for Persuasive Speaking	314
Providing Examples	314
Using Comparison and Contrast	315
Using Testimonials	315
Chapter Review	323

## 15 Using Communication Skills as You Enter the Workplace 326

Contemporary Jobs in Communication	327
------------------------------------	-----

Producing a Winning Résumé	327
Style	327
Content	329
Format	333
Writing a Convincing Cover Letter	335
Mastering the Job Interview	338
Create a Good First Impression	339
Speak with Clarity	340
Demonstrate Interest	340
More Tips for the Interview	340
Understand the Job	340
Understand the Company	341
Prepare for Behavioral-Based Interview Questions	341
Building Connections	344
Use Social Media to Expand Your Professional Network	344
Use Internships as a Networking Opportunity	345
Use the Informational Interview to Learn	345
Chapter Review	347

Glossary	G-1
Index	I-1



# part 1

# Communication Basics

**Why study communication?** Throughout these chapters, we will examine some compelling reasons. We'll begin with the basics of communication and the factors that affect the ways we communicate. We will also see that listening is an important, and often overlooked, communication skill.



Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock

## CHAPTER 1

### Communication, Perception, and Your Life

Why Study Communication?  
 What Is Communication?  
 The Components of Communication  
 Three Models of Communication  
 Perception Affects Communication  
 Differences in Perception  
 Errors in Perception  
 Self-Image and Communication  
 Chapter Review



Design Pics/Alamy Stock Photo

## CHAPTER 2

### Communicating Verbally

The Functions of Verbal Communication  
 How Words Communicate  
 The Rules of Verbal Communication  
 Words to Avoid  
 Words to Use Carefully  
 Strategies for Improving Your Verbal Communication  
 Chapter Review



Tzido Sun/Shutterstock

## CHAPTER 3

### Communicating Nonverbally

What Is Nonverbal Communication?  
 How Are Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Related?  
 What Are Nonverbal Codes?  
 Why Are Nonverbal Codes Difficult to Interpret?  
 How Can You Improve Your Nonverbal Communication?  
 Chapter Review



Jacqueline Veissid/Getty Images

## CHAPTER 4

### Communicating Through Listening

The Importance of Listening  
 Types of Listening  
 Attention and Listening  
 Barriers to Listening  
 Chapter Review



# chapter 1

## Communication, Perception, and Your Life



Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock

In this chapter we will take a look at why studying communication is so important. We will also describe the process of perception and explore the concepts of self-image and identity management, all powerful influences on communication.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- List the benefits of studying communication.
- Define communication and explain the roles that meaning and context play in it.
- Name and describe the components of communication.
- Name and describe the three models of communication.
- Describe the process of perception and its impact on communication.
- Explain the factors that affect and shape people's perceptions.
- Explain how and why errors in perception occur.
- Describe the ways in which self-image and identity management affect communication.

## WHY STUDY COMMUNICATION?

Communication is your link to others at home, at work, and on the street. Although communication isn't always easy, you can improve your communication skills with study and practice. That improvement typically begins with understanding why the study of communication is important.

1. *Studying communication can improve the way others see you.* Compare a person who stumbles over words, falls silent, interrupts, and uses inappropriate language with someone who has a good vocabulary, listens when you speak, and smoothly exchanges ideas with you. The second type of person is what we call a competent communicator, and most of us prefer to relate to this type. As you become increasingly competent, you will find that others will seek you out for conversations, assistance, and advice.
2. *Studying communication can make you more sensitive in your relationships.* By studying communication, you can learn specific ways to improve your relationships. A good example relates to listening. Men in our culture are rarely praised for being empathic or even considerate listeners. Women are widely perceived as talkers but also as better listeners. The actual style of listening often differs between men and women. Women engage in more relational listening, where people are more of the focus, whereas men engage in more action-oriented listening, where figuring out what to do about what is said is a greater focus.<sup>1</sup> Poor listening or engaging in the wrong style of listening can cause one partner in a relationship to think the other doesn't really care; that relationship may be doomed. Both men and women can learn to be effective listeners by following the practical advice on listening in Chapter 4.
3. *Studying communication can teach you important thinking skills.* Whether you are learning how to gather and evaluate information or to present an argument using evidence, you are working to hone your skills as a critical thinker,<sup>2</sup> problem solver, and decision maker. By studying communication and becoming more aware of the ways in which you communicate with others, you'll also become better at defining your own position on important issues, discerning which arguments and evidence are strong or weak, and analyzing which arguments and evidence your audience is likely to accept as proof.
4. *Studying communication can help you learn how to resolve conflicts at home, at work, and on the street.* Conflict is often resolved through effective communication, whether in person, on the telephone, or by e-mail.<sup>3</sup> You have also likely experienced conflicts that have gone unresolved and friendships that have been lost or relationships put on hold. In such cases, a meaningful exchange is often the key to finding a resolution. John Gottman, a social psychologist, and his fellow researchers even predicted which marriages would end in divorce by observing couples' inability to resolve conflict.<sup>4,5</sup> Good communication principles and practices can resolve disputes between individuals, as well as between organizations, political parties, and nations.



Tetra Images/Getty Images

5. *Studying communication can boost your confidence by helping you learn how to communicate in pairs, groups, and large audience contexts.* Results from a study conducted at a large public university showed that students who had completed a communication course were likely to feel confident, comfortable with how others perceived them, satisfied with their ability to reason with others, and able to use language appropriately in a variety of communication situations.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, research also suggests that students who complete a communication course feel more confident and skilled in knowing how to express themselves at work, in teams and groups, and in their personal relationships in comparison to students who do not take a basic communication course.<sup>7</sup>
6. *Studying communication will encourage you to expand your comfort zone in communicating with others.* As you stroll through a mall, deposit money in a bank, go to a movie, or work at your job, about one in every five people you come in contact with will speak English as a second language. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, over 67.3 million Americans speak a language other than English in their homes, and 45 percent of the people who do are native-born.<sup>8</sup> Learning how to communicate in today's world, whether English is your first language or not, requires an understanding of communication and culture and how those two concepts are related.
7. *Studying communication can help you succeed professionally.* A look at job postings online will give you an immediate understanding of the importance of improving your knowledge and practice of communication. What communication skills are employers seeking? The ability to speak clearly, succinctly, and persuasively is crucial to many jobs,<sup>9</sup> including sales positions,<sup>10</sup> as are public speaking skills.<sup>11</sup> Employers also value strong interpersonal skills<sup>12</sup> and an ability to work in teams or groups.<sup>13</sup> Professionals in fields as diverse as accounting, auditing, banking, counseling, engineering, information science, public relations, and sales have all noted the importance of oral communication skills.<sup>14</sup> The variety of these careers suggests that communication skills are important across the board. In fact, a recent survey from the Pew Research Center finds that most Americans agree that by and large the most important skill children must learn to succeed in life is communication.<sup>15</sup>

## WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

*Communication* comes from the Latin word *communicare*, which means “to make common” or “to share.” The root definition is consistent with our definition of **communication**—the process of using messages to generate meaning.

Communication is considered a process because it consists of a series of actions, activities, or behaviors we engage in to achieve a particular result. In communication, the result of this process is, ideally, the conveyance and interpretation of meaning through messages. In other words, communication is not an unchanging product, nor is it an object you can hold in your hand; it is an activity in which you participate.

When you smile at another person, you send a message—that you are friendly or that you are interested in that person. When a radio announcer chooses particular words—for example, *emergency*, *crisis*, or *disaster*—to describe an event, she creates a particular kind of message. Because of the importance of word choice, a public speaker might spend days choosing just the right words, as well as considering his bodily movements, gestures, and facial expression to get across the desired message. In each of these examples, the person hopes to generate common meanings through their messages.

Meaning, also covered in Chapter 2, is an understanding of the message as the speaker intended. People are not always successful in generating meaning. For example, a college professor may be very knowledgeable about a subject but has a hard time putting this knowledge in terms that students can relate to or understand. Understanding the meaning of another person's message cannot occur unless the two communicators have common meanings for words, phrases, and even movements and gestures. When you use language, common meanings facilitate a response that indicates that the message has been understood. For example, suppose you ask a friend for a ride home. She says nothing but walks with you to her car. You and your friend share the same meaning of the message exchanged.

But a message can be interpreted in more than one way, especially if the people involved have little shared experience. Let's say you ask a new friend to "meet at a restaurant for lunch around noon." You may assume that means he'll arrive at noon, no more than five to ten minutes late, but he thinks "around noon" means that the arrangement is loose. You arrive at the restaurant a few minutes before noon, but he does not appear until 12:30. You end up waiting, but you are not happy when he arrives so terribly late, by your understanding of the situation. In such a case, you could have determined more accurately what he was planning or thinking by *negotiating*. So, for example, if your new friend had said, "Would 12:30 or 12:45 be OK?" you might have responded, "No, that would be too late for me." Or you might have provided additional information to him—for example, by saying, "I have a class at 1:30, and I don't want our meal to be rushed, so it would be great if you could be there by noon." And if he said, "But you said 'around noon,'" you would explain, "Oh, I'm sorry. I really meant *at* noon."

Although we do not include this concept in our formal definition of communication, it is important to note that all communication happens in a **context**, meaning it occurs within *a set of circumstances or a situation*. Contexts for communication include both face-to-face and mediated situations. For example, two friends talking on the way to class or five business acquaintances in a small-group setting are examples of face-to-face contexts. Students using e-mail to

interact with pen pals across the country or a parent on a business trip touching base with family via FaceTime are examples of interaction contexts that rely on mediated communication. At many colleges and universities, the material covered in communication courses is defined by interaction context: interpersonal, global and intercultural, mediated, and organizational or small-group. In other words, communication occurs in a variety of contexts. Part 2 looks at a number of these contexts in depth.

## THE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

In this section you will see how communication really works by learning about its components: people, messages, channels, feedback, code, encoding and decoding, and noise. In the next section, by looking at three models of communication, you will see how each component has a part to play in the process of generating, as well as potentially obstructing, the meaning of a message.

### People

People are involved in the human communication process in two roles—as both the sources and the receivers of messages. A **source** *initiates a message*, and a **receiver** *is the intended target of the message*. Individuals do not perform these two roles independently. Instead, they are the sources and the receivers of messages simultaneously and continually.

People may vary in the way they respond to the same message; they may also vary in the way they convey the same message. An individual's characteristics, including race, sex, age, culture, values, and attitudes, affect the way that individual sends and receives messages. A teenager, for example, uses slang expressions that an older person is less likely to use or perhaps even to understand. An acquaintance might use Facebook to maintain contact with you, your parents perhaps use text messages, and your grandparents probably use the telephone. In addition to the channels being different, the words that each communicator chooses will likely differ.

### The Message

The **message** *is the verbal and nonverbal expression of the idea, thought, or feeling that one person (the source) wishes to communicate to another person or group of people (the receivers)*. As noted, the message includes the verbal symbols (words and phrases) you use to communicate your ideas, as well as the nonverbal ones—that is, your facial expressions, bodily movements, gestures, use of physical contact, and tone of voice. The message may be relatively brief and easy to understand or long and complex.

Communication can take the form of either intentional or unintentional messages. For example, if you wave to your friend when she enters a shopping center where you agreed to meet, that is intentional communication; you want her to see you and walk over to you. But if you just happen to have your hand in the air when she comes in (perhaps you are scratching your head) and she

thinks you are waving to her, that is unintentional. Nevertheless, you have communicated, and she may come toward you and begin to carry on a conversation, whether you wanted her to or not. Messages conveyed through mediated communication channels can also be distorted. For example, an e-mail to your friend conveys limited nonverbal messages, which can be crucial to correctly interpreting a verbal (written) message.

### The Channel

The **channel** is *the means by which a message moves from the source to the receiver of the message*. Airwaves, sound waves, twisted copper wires, glass fibers, and cable are all communication channels. So are phone calls, e-mails, text messages, face-to-face conversations, and so on. The channel used to convey a message can have great significance. Does anyone think that breaking off a serious relationship with someone by text is the right way? When the spouse of an active-duty soldier sees an armed forces car in front of the house, with two uniformed officers on their way to the door, that spouse can be pretty sure that this personal attention is not good news. Yes, the channel, the means of delivering a message, makes a serious difference. A delivery of flowers, an electronic get-well card, a surprise birthday cake—all of these are channels used to deliver a message, sometimes with words and sometimes with acts or items.

### Feedback

**Feedback** is *the receiver's verbal and nonverbal response to the source's message*. Ideally, you respond to another person's messages by providing feedback, so that the source knows you received the message as intended. Feedback is part of any communication situation. Even no response, or silence, is feedback, as are confused looks and packing away of laptops by students in a lecture hall. Suppose you're looking for a restroom in a building you've never been in before. "Excuse me," you say to a passerby, "can you tell me . . . ," but the person keeps on going without acknowledging you. In this case, the intended receiver did not respond, yet even the lack of a response provides you with some feedback. You may think that the receiver didn't hear you, was in too much of a hurry to stop, or is unfriendly.

### Code

A computer carries messages via binary code on cable, wire, or fiber; similarly, you converse with others by using a code called "language." A **code** is *a systematic arrangement of symbols used to create meanings in the mind of another person or persons*. As you will learn in Chapter 2, words, phrases, and sentences are "symbols" we all use to evoke images, thoughts, and ideas in the minds of others. If someone yells "Stop!" as you approach the street, the word *stop* is a symbol you are likely to interpret as a warning of danger.



Image Source, All rights reserved



Verbal and nonverbal codes are the two types of code used in communication. Verbal codes are the spoken language we use. “Stop!” in the previous example is a verbal code. Some examples of nonverbal codes, defined and discussed in Chapter 3, are facial expressions (like a smile or a furrowed brow), touch (a handshake), and the clothing and other artifacts you wear (your interview suit, a pair of earrings, a tattoo).

### Encoding and Decoding

Because communication involves the use of codes, the process of communicating can be viewed as one of encoding and decoding. **Encoding** is the process of translating an idea or a thought into words. **Decoding** is the process of assigning meaning to an encoded message.

For instance, suppose you want to get a new dog from the shelter. You are trying to describe the type of dog that you’re looking for your friend, who wants to help you find a new pet for your home. You might be visualizing the first dog you had in your home growing up, a small cuddly dog that doesn’t bark much or shed. Translating this vision into words, or encoding it, you tell your friend only that you are interested in dogs that are “small in size and hypoallergenic.” Your friend, on hearing this, decodes your words and develops his own mental image. But his love of bigger dogs and your lack of precision affect this process; as a result, he envisions a medium to larger size dog that slobbers more than you had in mind.

As you can see, misunderstanding often occurs because of the limitations of language, the inadequacy of descriptions, and a person’s own biases and past experiences. Nonetheless, encoding and decoding are essential to communication, and meanings can be further refined and clarified through negotiation—that is, through asking questions or paraphrasing: “Are you open to a golden retriever as a pet?” “No, I was thinking more about a dog that doesn’t shed and is between ten and fifteen pounds.”



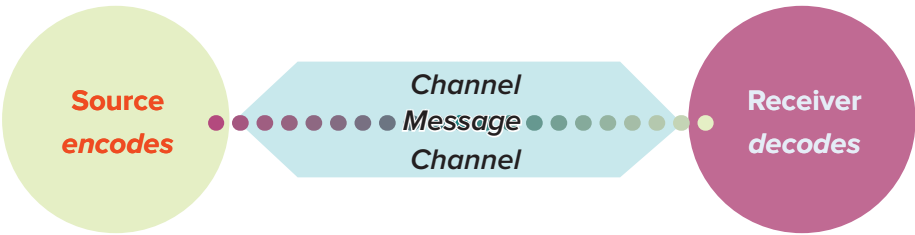
Jamie Grill/Blend Images/JGI/Getty Images

### Noise

In the communication process, **noise** is any interference in the encoding and decoding processes that reduces the clarity of a message. Noise can include a variety of distractions—auditory ones, such as loud sounds; visual ones, such as a piece of food between someone’s front teeth; and behavioral ones, such as someone standing too close for comfort. Noise can also be psychological, such as struggling to take seriously someone whose personality annoys you; physical, such as pain from a tooth; or semantic, such as uncertainty about what the other person’s words mean. Noise is anything that interferes with receiving, interpreting, or providing feedback about a message. You can find out more about noise and other barriers to listening in Chapter 4.



**Figure 1.1** The Action Model of Communication



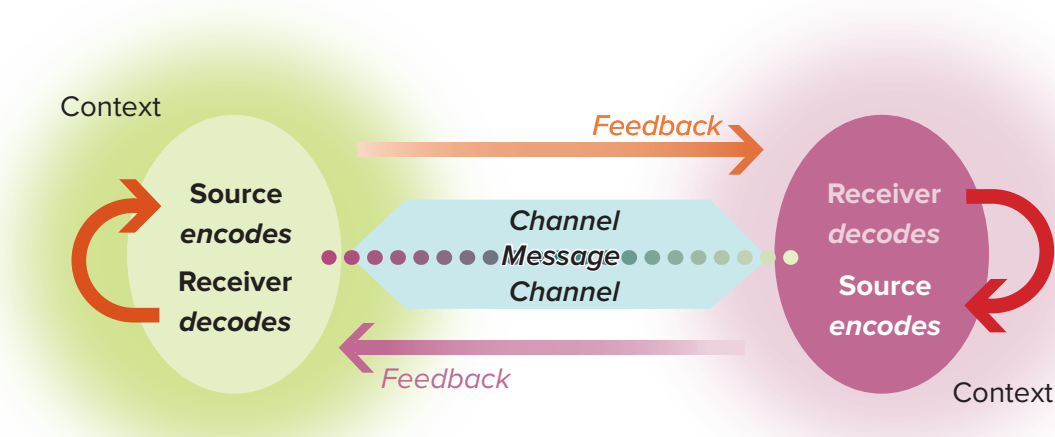
THREE MODELS OF COMMUNICATION

Over the years, scholars have developed three basic models of the communication process: the action model, the interaction model, and the transaction model. Each model represents a particular way of understanding the communication process. We'll begin with the model that came first, the action model (Figure 1.1).

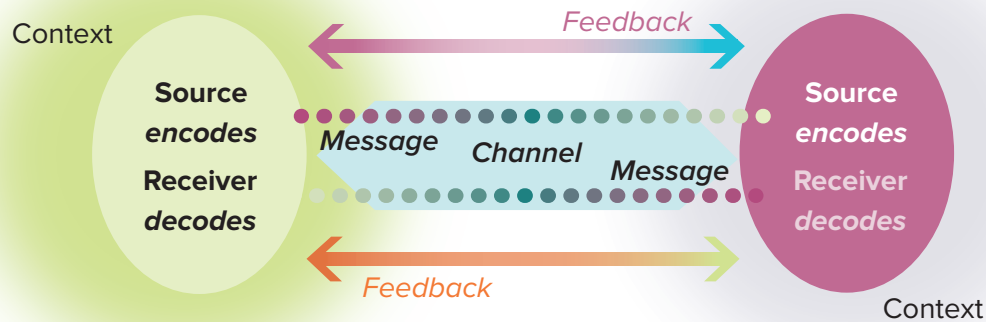
The action model is the most basic model, which depicts a one-way process in which a source encodes a message (puts it into language), then sends it through a channel (e.g., a text message or a face-to-face interaction) for the receiver to decode, or interpret. For example, you text a friend to tell her you will be late for your dinner plans. Your friend receives the message and interprets it to mean that she will need to change your reservation at the restaurant, so that you can meet a little later.

The second model is the interaction model, illustrated in Figure 1.2. Although the interaction model includes all the same components as the action model, it differs in two important ways. First, it sees communication as a two-way process; second, it recognizes the role of context and feedback. For instance, you text the

**Figure 1.2** The Interaction Model of Communication



**Figure 1.3** The Transaction Model of Communication



same friend about dinner, but this time you take into account that this is her birthday dinner (the context) and that she is likely to be irritated by your change of plans (her feedback). Perhaps you write a text message to explain the reasons for your lag, in hopes that she will understand and not feel that her birthday plans have been ruined.

Finally, the transaction model differs from the other two in that it doesn't distinguish between the source and the receiver and does not see communication as a series of messages that get sent back and forth. Instead, the transaction model, laid out in **Figure 1.3**, sees communication as an ongoing conversation in which messages are sent in both directions simultaneously. As you begin to send your friend a second text to explain that you are having car trouble, she has already written back to say that she will change the reservation and meet you later that evening. In response to this message, you stop texting and call her to thank her for her understanding and to wish her a happy birthday. In other words, according to the transaction model, even as you are acting as the source of a message, you are also responding to feedback and acting as a receiver, all at the same time.

## PERCEPTION AFFECTS COMMUNICATION

The definition of communication we have provided and the three models we have laid out still do not provide a complete picture of this complex topic. Another very important factor that affects communication is perception.

### What Is Perception?

**Perception** is the process of using the senses to acquire information about the surrounding environment or situation.<sup>16</sup> The process of perception involves three stages: selection, organization, and interpretation. **Selection** refers to the decisions

*we make to focus on some stimuli—sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations—and neglect others.* We all do this all the time—selecting the messages to which we attend. Perhaps you tend to tune out your nagging roommate but pay close attention to every word of praise from your boss. Selection also occurs when you size up people. Based on your experience with different people, you may treat them with respect, talk to them, or avoid them. Each of these treatments is a response to your perceptions of others.

**Organization** means *grouping stimuli into meaningful units*. In some cases we organize by distinguishing between the figure—or focal point of our attention—and the background against which that figure is set. An employer chooses your name from a list of applicants. For the employer, your name is the figure and all other names have fallen into the background. We also organize using *closure* (the tendency to fill in missing information), *proximity* (perceiving distinct objects as related because of their physical closeness), and *similarity* (grouping objects because they share attributes). You perceive your new boss to be unkind because you overheard him raising his voice (closure); an acquaintance believes you and your best friend to be dating because you are always seen together (proximity); you anticipate getting along with your brother's girlfriend because in a photo she resembles a good friend of yours (similarity).

Finally, perception involves **interpretation**, *the assignment of meaning to stimuli*. When we are mindful of our own perceptions, the way we organize information, and our own intrapersonal interactions, we can more accurately control the interpretations that we attach to people and situations in our lives. For example, a Democrat may be quick to judge a new Republican friend they just made as someone who would never share the same values they do. When we slow down the process of connecting an interpretation for someone or something to include careful solicitation and evaluation or a range of individualized facts about the person or situation, we come to see people beyond broad ways society sometimes influences our interpretations of situations and people in everyday life. Thus, the way we perceive others—and the way they, in turn, perceive us—involves selection, organization, and interpretation. You can likely already imagine how these processes affect your communication with others.

### What Occurs in Perception?

You meet with your supervisor, thinking she is going to praise you for all the extra work you have done lately, so you approach your meeting perceiving her in a warm and friendly way. When she instead tells you she's reducing your hours because profits are down, your perception of her changes, and the nature of your communication with her (the tone of your voice, the words you choose) is likely to change as well. When this kind of mismatch occurs—between what one expects and what occurs—surprise can turn to anger and disappointment (and no more extra work for that ungrateful supervisor).

Since each person's perceptions are unique, communication is a complicated matter. You will have a better understanding of how complex perception is and

how your individual perceptions influence your communication with others once you consider the following two kinds of perception:

- *Active perception.* This is the process by which the mind selects, organizes, and interprets what one senses. You could think of each person you communicate with as having a video camera with a unique lens; as those people aim their camera at different things, they see different colors, degrees of light, and perspectives.
- *Subjective perception.* This is the process by which one attributes meaning to sensed stimuli. To understand this process, consider how much your inner state affects your perceptions. If you have a bad headache, the pain probably will affect the way you feel about your children, the way you respond to the workers at the shop, and even the way you see yourself in a mirror. These perceptions will likely change when your headache subsides in a few hours.

## DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION

The uniqueness of human experience is based largely on differences in perception. These differences result from physiological features, past experiences, roles, and present feelings.

### Physiological Features

People differ from each other in a multiplicity of physiological ways: for example, sex, height, weight, body type, race, and acuity of the senses. Each of these features affects the way you see yourself and the way you interact with others.



Stephen M. Dowell/Orlando Sentinel/Tribune News Service/Getty Images

Just imagine if you were a different race and sex or if you had hearing or vision loss, how those features would influence your perceptions and, in turn, how you would communicate with others. If you are particularly attractive, you may be accustomed to people looking at you and giving you favored attention. If you are short, the whole world looks very tall. If you have trouble hearing, you might avoid the telephone, especially cell phones, and prefer to text.

### Past Experiences

Your *past experiences lead you to see the world in a way that is difficult to change*. This concept is known as **perceptual constancy**. For example, a bad experience in a given situation may cause you to avoid that situation in the future, just as a good one might encourage you to seek out that situation. In addition, your past experiences affect how you perceive certain categories of people—men, women, professors, police, politicians—whether in a positive or negative way. These perceptions also influence your current and future communication with those categories of people. You may choose never to remarry if you have gone through a difficult divorce. You might seek help from a police officer because your father spent his career in policing; or, you

might avoid the police if your brother was treated poorly during an arrest. You might perceive education to be valuable if everyone you know who completed college has a successful job; or, you might view school as unnecessary to success if your mother holds a prestigious job with little higher education. In short, a variety of personal experience colors our beliefs and perceptions.

### Roles

A **role** is *a part a person plays in a social context*.<sup>17</sup> The roles we attribute to others affect the way we perceive them, and vice versa. If you play the role of a leader or a loner or a nerd, this will affect the way others perceive you and how receptive they are to your messages. If you label others as athletes, single moms, or beauty queens, that perception will affect your communication with them—the topics you choose to discuss, the vocabulary you use, and the credibility you give to their opinions.

### Present Feelings

How you feel at the moment affects your perceptions—what you see and hear and how it looks and sounds to you—and these perceptions alter your communication. Great news about your mother's health, a brief fight this evening before class, or a disagreeable e-mail from your boss—all these life experiences influence your perceptions and how or whether you communicate with the people around you.

How can you apply this information about perception to your own life? Imagine you are talking to a classmate about an assignment but he looks away and does not respond to you. Your first thought might be that he is distant and uninterested or that he doesn't like you. The truth might be that he is catching a cold and doesn't want to talk because his throat hurts. Or he may be reluctant to get involved because he has helped classmates with their work in the past and gotten no gratitude for his effort. Or it might be something far more basic—that he is hungry and is just trying to get away from you so he can go eat! Clearly, his present circumstances and internal states are influencing his communication with you.

Students of communication who know about the role of perception in communication have a better idea of how to manage such situations. When faced with someone acting unpredictably, they would start by checking their own perceptions and inquiring about the other person's perceptions. They would give the other person a chance to say what is troubling him: "You are not answering me. Am I being unreasonable in asking for your help?" In any case, a person who is knowledgeable about how perception influences communication has an advantage in the exchange.

## ERRORS IN PERCEPTION

Once we understand the active nature of perception and recognize that people hold unique perceptions as a consequence, we can see that we might make errors when we perceive other people. Many types of perceptual errors exist.



SKILL

## BUILDER

### LEARN TO CHECK YOUR PERCEPTIONS

With a partner in class, identify a physical feature that you believe affects your communication with others, such as your height, weight, skin color, age, hairstyle, clothing, jewelry, scars, or tattoos.

- First say how you think this feature affects your communication with others.
- Next let the other person say how they perceive this feature.
- Then switch roles and repeat.

Discuss with your partner how your perceptions about the features you identified were similar or dissimilar to each other. How do you think your life experiences have contributed to the perceptions you hold about your own physical features? What about the physical features of others around you? By practicing these steps, you and your partner are checking your perceptions about features that affect your communication.

In Chapter 6, we take a closer look at one of the most common errors, stereotyping. Stereotypes occur when we make a hasty generalization about a group based on a judgment about an individual from that group. Stereotypes often lead to prejudices, a topic also discussed in Chapter 6.

Therefore, an important skill is perception checking—a process of describing, interpreting, and verifying that helps you understand another person and that person's message more accurately. The three steps of perception checking are as follows:

1. Describe to the other person the observed behavior—including the verbal and nonverbal cues.
2. Suggest plausible interpretations of that behavior or feature.
3. Seek verification or rebuttal of your interpretations by asking for clarification, explanation, or amplification.

For example, imagine that you are assigned a group research project in one of your classes. Another member of the group asks you to produce all your primary sources for the project. You presented this source material weeks ago. You respond by saying, "I understand that you want me to give you my primary sources" (describe the behavior or the message). "I might just be acting paranoid, but this makes me feel that you don't trust me" (first interpretation). "Why do you want my primary sources?" (request for clarification).

Perception checking can be even more important in personal and romantic relationships—especially if the person you are dating grew up in a different family situation or social group than you did. Whatever the relationship, though, you will want to avoid suggesting interpretations that cause the other





# COMMUNICATION IN ACTION

## Engaging in Perception Checking

*Learning about checking perceptions made me reevaluate the techniques I have used to interact with others. Engaging in perception checking allows me to find clarity in views presented by other people, including those I might not agree with on an issue. It also helps me to advocate for my own feelings and interpretations about what I heard them say. What I like best about applying this technique is that it allows for purposeful discourse between myself and others instead of one-sided narratives. In this way, perception checking embodies true communication between two people—we can each ask for the other’s individual perspective without conceding our own stances on issues.*

Marina DiFranco

Visual Communication Design Major

person to feel defensive. Chapter 5, on interpersonal relationships, offers some very important advice as to how to avoid defensive interactions with the people in your life.

## SELF-IMAGE AND COMMUNICATION

How you see yourself can make a big difference in how you communicate.<sup>18</sup> The great philosopher, sociologist, and psychologist George Herbert Mead said that the self originates in communication.<sup>19</sup> Through verbal and nonverbal symbols, which are the basis of communication, a child comes to accept the expectations of others and, in turn, takes on certain roles. When people are treated as though they are inferior, or intelligent, or gifted, or unattractive, they often act accordingly.

Many communication scholars and social scientists believe that people are products of how others treat them and of the messages others send them. Venus and Serena Williams have won over forty combined Grand Slam titles and five Olympic gold medals in tennis. They also happen to be sisters, who were coached, from very young ages, by their father Richard Williams. He taught them to be sensible and balanced, but also incredibly competitive in their sport. Most likely the sisters had an inherent physical ability for playing tennis, but they may not have achieved success without the early messages received from their father and coach.<sup>20</sup> Like the Williams sisters, each of us establishes a self-image based on the messages we receive and the categories others apply to us. A recent study suggests that



Julian Finney/Getty Images



a mother's messages to her daughter about body image affect the daughter's perceptions about her own body image, and the way she treats her body.<sup>21</sup> In other words, positive, negative, and neutral messages all play a role in how we think about ourselves.

Communication itself is probably best understood as a dialogic process. A **dialogue** is simply *a conversation, discussion, or negotiation*, so communication is a process that occurs in the context of our interactions with other people.<sup>22</sup> A competent communicator considers the other person's needs and expectations when selecting messages to share. Thus, communication begins with the self, as defined largely by others, and involves others, as defined largely by the self.

For example, you can have **intrapersonal communication**, which is *the kind of discussion and decision making that occurs within your own mind*. Consider a situation of importance, such as asking the boss for more responsibilities so that you can earn a larger salary. Before you ever enter the boss' office, you will likely consider what you plan to say, rehearse in your mind how you are going to say it, and even consider what your response is going to be, no matter how the discussion proceeds. Yes, you worry, try out lines, and guess what will be said without uttering a word out loud. You are experiencing intrapersonal communication.

Our perceptions are often impacted by our intrapersonal communication. For example, if you think of yourself as someone who struggles to make friends, your internal voice might prevent you from initiating contact with others. You might try telling yourself "even though I struggle to know what to say to new people, I am going force myself to talk to at least one new person every week." In other words, when we are mindful of our own intrapersonal communication habits, we can adjust them and use them to our advantage.

One example is what is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy, which is when we use own cognition, or our internal voice, to bring to pass a different reality. When we do not approach situations because of our own internal doubts, we engage in a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. In such cases, we are preventing our own growth and change. Our minds, cognitions, and intrapersonal interactions can help us grow, or prevent us from doing so, in powerful ways.

Of course, few of our daily interactions are as rehearsed as the ones just described, and as we move from one encounter to the next, we present ourselves to people in a variety of ways, both consciously and unconsciously. Self-presentation can be defined as the way we portray ourselves to others.

A key part of self-presentation is **identity management**—*the control (or lack of control) of what we communicate and what it conveys about us*. Through identity management,



John Lund/Marc Romane/Age Fotostock

## CONNECTING GLOBALLY

### TAKE A VACATION FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

Interaction through social media has become an important part of our daily routines. However, despite its many benefits, some people argue that social media consumes too much of our time, encourages self-centered behaviors, negatively affects our productivity, and keeps us from engaging with others face to face.

How much time do you think you spend checking or posting to a social media site? Have you ever wondered what life is like without social media? To experience the benefits of “unplugging,” some people take planned breaks from social media. Here’s how to do it:

- Post to your primary social media accounts a message explaining that you are temporarily taking a break from social media.
- Disable your notifications so that you can truly experience the benefits of stepping away.
- Keep a journal about your experience of life without social media.

The following questions might help you frame your journal entries exploring your relationship to social media:

- What are the major benefits and drawbacks of taking a break from social media?
- Do you feel like you are missing out on anything, or do you enjoy being able to unplug?
- If you are comfortable sharing your thoughts, ideas, and personality through social media, how does it feel to interact face to face? With which mode of interaction are you more comfortable and why?
- Do you tend to use social media to get your information about the issues and trends impacting society? If so, how do you go about gathering information without social media? Has your understanding of global and local issues changed during your social media hiatus? How so?
- Do you think other people you know would share your experience of unplugging from social media? Will you recommend the experience to your friends?

we try to present an idealized version of ourselves in order to reach desired ends. A good example is a social media profile you update frequently. The identity you project in that profile depends in part on whether you use that site for personal or professional reasons, or a combination of those. If you intend the profile to attract potential dating partners, you might manage your identity by posting more selfies, or photos of yourself, doing things you enjoy in order to enhance perceptions of you as a fun or caring person. On a professional site like LinkedIn, your aim is to find a job or advance your career, so you highlight your accomplishments and take care to promote a professional identity by posting information that is accurate and free of grammatical errors. We all practice identity management in face-to-face interactions as well, presenting the self we want others to see.

People manage their identity and the impressions they make using three elements of communication: manner, appearance, and setting.<sup>23</sup> Manner is the way an individual typically interacts with others through verbal and nonverbal symbols. A person's manner might be brusque or silly, businesslike or immature, friendly, warm, or gracious. Appearance may be tied to a role an individual plays (such as an administrative assistant versus a barista or rock musician), a value one holds (wearing jewelry versus not), one's personality (easygoing versus formal), or one's view of the communication setting (unimportant as opposed to crucial). The setting includes the immediate environment (the space in which you are communicating, such as a church as opposed to a coffee shop), as well as other settings in which you display who you are (your home and the way you decorate it, the type of car you drive). Thus, in the content of mediated communication such as a Zoom meeting, you might consider about how the setting of your home office impacts the way that people come to learn more about your identity. For example, consider what types of identity markers are on display, such as books, photographs, or trophies. Practice impression management by carefully evaluating the impressions your office setting might give to different audiences. Ask yourself, Who is my audience and what are their expectations of me in this context?

Although communication is complicated, it occurs almost every minute of your life. If you are not communicating with yourself (thinking, planning, reacting to the world around you), you are actively and subjectively perceiving others and responding to their behavior. Even if others did not intend messages for you, you gather observations and draw conclusions. A person yawns and you believe she is bored with your message. A second person looks away and you conclude that he is not listening to you. A third person smiles (perhaps because of a memory of a joke she heard recently) and you believe she is attracted to you. We are continually interpreting the meanings of others' verbal and nonverbal messages, as well as behaving in ways that have communicative value for them.



## CHAPTER REVIEW

**Communication is far more than the transmission of information. To communicate involves multiple variables—its verbal, nonverbal, and behavioral aspects; the channel used; the characteristics and perceptions of the sender and the receiver; the relationship of the sender to the receiver; and the context in which the communication occurs. Each of these variables—including the communicator's self-perception and identity-management processes—affects every aspect of communication.**

## KEY TERMS

communication, 4	noise, 8
context, 5	perception, 10
message, 6	selection, 10
receiver, 6	interpretation, 11
source, 6	organization, 11
channel, 7	perceptual constancy, 12
code, 7	role, 13
feedback, 7	dialogue, 16
decoding, 8	identity management, 16
encoding, 8	intrapersonal communication, 16

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. List at least ten ways you use communication in a single day, from the moment you wake in the morning until you fall asleep at night. How can you become a more competent communicator with regard to each of the items on your list?
2. Why do we call communication a process? What parts of the process influence meaning, and how do people arrive at a shared meaning of a message?
3. Give three specific examples of feedback that college students receive. How does this feedback shape their thinking and behavior?
4. Give examples from your own experience of perceptions organized by closure, proximity, and similarity.
5. Of the four factors that produce differences in perception, which do you think is most powerful? Why? Do you think one can be ranked as more important than the others? Why or why not?
6. Think of a time when perceptual checking would have helped you better understand another person's message. Describe how you would, in that instance, follow the three steps of perceptual checking.
7. List various identities you present in your daily life. How do you manage each via manner, appearance, and setting?

## ENDNOTES

1. Johnston, M. K., Weaver, J. B., Watson, K. W., & Barker, L. B. (2000). Listening styles, biological or psychological differences? *International Journal of Listening*, 14, 32–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2000.10499034>
2. Allen, M., Berkowitz, S., Hunt, S., & Loudon, A. (1999). A meta-analysis of the impact of forensics and communication education on critical thinking. *Communication Education*, 48, 18–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634529909379149>
3. Markman, H. J., Renick, M. J., Floyd, F. J., Stangel, S. M., & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A 4- and 5-year follow up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 70–77. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.61.1.70>

4. Gottman, J. M., & Levenson, R. W. (1999). Rebound from marital conflict and divorce prediction. *Family Process*, 38, 287–292. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.1999.00287.x>
5. Scott, E. (2011). *Conflict resolution skills for healthy relationships: The key to less relationship stress? Effective conflict resolution skills!* [http://stress.about.com/od/relationships/a/conflict\\_res.htm](http://stress.about.com/od/relationships/a/conflict_res.htm)About.com
6. Ford, W. S. Z., & Wolvin, A. D. (1993). The differential impact of a basic communication course on perceived communication competencies in class, work, and social contexts. *Communication Education*, 42, 215–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634529309378929>
7. Hodis, G. M., & Hodis, F. A. (2012). Trends in communicative self-efficacy: A comparative analysis. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 24, 40–80.
8. Zeigler, K., & Camarota, S. A. (2014, October). *One in five U.S. residents speaks foreign language at home*. Center for Immigration Studies. <http://cis.org/One-in-Five-US-Residents-Speaks-Foreign-Language-at-Home>
9. Adams, S. (2014, November 12). The 10 skills employers most want in 2015 graduates. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2014/11/12/the-10-skills-employers-most-want-in-2015-graduates/#3ce468752511>
10. Nichols, M. (2006, September 15). Listen up for better sales. *BusinessWeek Online*, 12.
11. Bates, J. (2004, December 15). Unaccustomed as I am . . . *Nursing Standard*, 19(14–16), 25.
12. Johnson, L. M., & Johnson, V. E. (1995, January/February). Help wanted—accountant: What the classifieds say about employer expectations. *Journal of Education for Business*, 70(3), 130–134.
13. Cano, C. P., & Cano, P. Q. (2006). Human resources management and its impact on innovation performance in companies. *International Journal of Technology Management*, 35, 11–27. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTM.2006.009227>
14. Hanzevack, E. L., & McKean, R. A. (1991). Teaching effective oral presentations as part of the senior design course. *Chemical Engineering Education*, 25, 28–32; Horton, G. E., & Brown, D. (1990). The importance of interpersonal skills in consultee-centered consultation: A review. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 68, 423–426. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1990.tb02522.x>; LaBar, G. (1994). Putting together the complete hygienist. *Occupational Hazards*, 56, 63–66; Messmer, M. (1997, August). Career strategies for accounting graduates. *Management Accounting*, 79(2), 4–10; Nisberg, J. N. (1996). Communication: What we hear, what we say vs. what they hear, what they say. *The National Public Accountant*, 41, 34–38; Ridley, A. J. (1996). A profession for the twenty-first century. *Internal Auditor*, 53, 20–25; Simkin, M. G. (1996). The importance of good communication skills on “IS” career paths. *Journal of Technical Writing & Communication*, 26, 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.2190/GHU2-JRNF-T4PB-6YWY>
15. Goo, S. A. (2015, February 19). *The skills Americans say kids need to succeed in life*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/02/19/skills-for-success/>
16. Perception. *Encarta Dictionary*. (2011).
17. Role. *Encarta Dictionary*. (2011).
18. Yahaya, A. (2009). The relationship of self-concept and communication skills towards academic achievement among secondary school students in Johor Bahru. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*. <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijps/article/view/3931>

19. Mead, G. H. (1967). *Mind, self, and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist* (Charles W. Morris, Ed.). University of Chicago Press.
20. Araton, H. (2015, August 27). Williams sisters leave an impact that's unmatched. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/31/sports/tennis/venus-and-serena-williams-have-a-lasting-impact.html>
21. Arroyo, A., & Andersen, K. (2016). Appearance-related communication and body image outcomes: Fat talk and old talk among mothers and daughters. *Journal of Family Communication*, 16, 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2016.1144604>
22. For further reading see Czubaroff, J. (2000). Dialogical rhetoric: An application of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 86, 168–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630009384288>
23. Wiggins, J. A., Wiggins, B. B., & Zanden, J. (1993). *Social psychology* (4th ed.). McGraw Hill.



# chapter 2

## Communicating Verbally



Design Pics/Alamy Stock Photo

This chapter will look at the functions and rules of verbal communication, with three goals in mind: to demonstrate the multiple ways you use verbal communication, to help you avoid errors and offenses, and to guide you in making the best possible impression with your words.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Name and explain the four primary functions of verbal communication.
- Explain the meanings and processes by which words communicate.
- Explain the rules that influence and guide verbal communication.
- Recognize the categories of words speakers should avoid to present themselves as thoughtful and balanced verbal communicators.
- Recognize the categories of words speakers should use in moderation to present themselves as thoughtful and balanced verbal communicators.
- List and give examples of strategies that will improve a speaker's verbal communication.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Imagine that today, in one of your classes, a teacher told you that your assignment is due in two weeks; another teacher told you to tell a story in which two characters have a conflict; a third teacher asked you to analyze the school's parking policy; and a fourth stopped you on your way out of class to ask whether you were feeling OK. All four teachers were trying to get messages across to you, mainly with words—with verbal communication.

However, if one of those teachers looked you directly in the eye while speaking, pointed a finger at you, or pounded her fist on a desk, these forms of nonverbal communication would also have meaning and affect your response to the message. We communicate with each other with words, or verbal communication, as well as with eye contact, movement, and gestures (nonverbal communication), and the two forms work together to create a message.

This chapter focuses on **verbal communication**, which is *the use of language to convey meaning*. **Language** is *the code we use to communicate with each other*, a code that follows rules to encourage understanding. **Meaning** is more of a challenge to define, because it refers to *whatever message someone is trying to convey to others, as well as how that message is interpreted*. Although you use verbal communication every day, you may not be aware of the many roles it plays in your relationships. To understand verbal communication, let's look at four of the functions it performs: the instrumental, creative, analytical, and social functions.



Maskot/Getty Images

### The Instrumental Function

The first teacher mentioned earlier—the one who told you when your assignment was due—was using the **instrumental function** of verbal communication. That is, she was *using language as a directive—a means of getting others to think or do something*. When you use language in an instrumental way, you are using it as a tool or, as the term implies, as an instrument.<sup>1</sup> Instrumental language is unadorned, straightforward, and very descriptive<sup>2</sup>: “The assignment is due in two weeks,” “You need to change the oil in your car every 5,000 miles,” and “You should vote or quit griping about our leadership.” Scientific and technical communication tends to be instrumental: a chemist's formula, an engineer's instructions for building a robot, and the fix for a computer problem are examples of language used instrumentally.



Photosindia/Getty Images



## The Creative Function

The second teacher—the one who asked you to tell a brief story—was promoting the **creative function** of verbal communication, in which *imagination meets writing or speaking ability*. Called *elocutio* by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian in AD 95,<sup>3</sup> this function was one of the five canons (principles) of rhetoric. As an illustration of modern-day creativity with language, social media have spawned inventive acronyms and abbreviations (*lol, sup, idk, omg*) for quick texting and tweeting, in which the message needs to fit within a 140-character limit.<sup>4</sup> People are usually a pretty good judge of their own creative capabilities. Media- and journalism-related professions often look for people who can use language in more creative ways to write compelling stories and produce advertisements full of vivid imagery. In a recent study people who self-identified as creative were more inventive with their language and were more likely to come up with unique uses for everyday objects.<sup>5</sup> However, if it doesn't come naturally to you, creative use of language can be learned. When you are asked to use language in an imaginative way, a range of rhetorical devices are at your disposal—for example, metaphors, similes, hyperbole (exaggeration), and alliteration. These figures of speech allow writers and speakers to play with language and expand its potential.

A **metaphor** (MET-ah-four) *creatively compares two things that do not at first seem alike*: “The morning rainstorm was a crushing blow to his plans,” “This economy is a sinking ship,” “I’m queen of the house,” “Our country is the world’s police officer.” Martin Luther King Jr. was an expert at using metaphors to help people understand difficult concepts, like justice. In his “I Have a Dream” speech he compared the injustices faced by people of color to a fraudulent check written by the United States to people of color. Why was this metaphor so powerful? Because people have a hard time understanding concepts like justice, but money is a very tangible and concrete concept that we deal with daily.<sup>6</sup>

A **simile** (SIM-ah-lee) *creatively compares two unlike things, using the word “like” or “as.”* Popular culture reflects many examples of similes. For example, have you ever heard someone say, “They fought like cats and dogs;” “Your bedroom is as clean as a whistle;” or “He is as strong as an ox.” Similes help us understand concepts that can sometimes be complicated to explain, such as anger, cleanliness, or strength. The writer, orator, and abolitionist Fredrick Douglass, who was himself a former slave, makes powerful use of simile when writing about his condition after receiving a beating: “I suppose I looked like a man who had escaped a den of wild beasts, and barely escaped them.”<sup>7</sup> This image vividly conveys to readers the terror Douglass experienced. During his lifetime, Douglass used figurative and creative language to help his audience understand the evils of slavery, and his words maintain their impact today.

**Hyperbole** (high-PURR-baa-lee) *is the use of exaggeration to make a point*: “He looked as if he had been run over by a tank” and “My girlfriend is the most beautiful woman in the world.” Hyperbole makes use of the extremes to get people to pay attention to the issue at hand. They are often used more effectively in advertising campaigns.

**Alliteration** is the repetition of the initial sound of a word: “The problem is the price of property,” “His tiny, timid eyes looked tired,” “She proudly pranced on stage.” Alliteration is used primarily in poetry and advertising, where it can contribute to rhythm and memorization.

Words targeting the ear (as in speaking) rather than the eye (as in writing) require repetition. Listeners daydream and let their thoughts wander during presentations, so they may need to hear important points several times. To get a message across, then, speakers need to use creative techniques to enhance understanding. One well-known method is to preview by saying what you plan to cover, review by restating in other words what you just said, and summarize to wrap up the message.

Also, effective speakers offer multiple kinds of support for their arguments and ideas. In addition to basic explanations, speakers can incorporate relevant YouTube videos, demonstrations, comparisons, contrasts, and even stories and case studies. The creative use of language can contribute significantly to audience understanding.

### The Analytical Function

When the third teacher asked you to analyze the school’s parking policy, he was prompting you to use the **analytical function** of verbal communication, which involves *the use of critical thinking skills to evaluate and critique an issue or idea*. A first step in critical thinking is research. For this assignment, you need to find, read, and understand your school’s parking policy and explain it in your own words. Next you need to evaluate it by asking questions such as these: “What is the reasoning behind this policy?” “Is this policy fair to students?” “Is this policy fair to nonstudent residents in the area?” “Should any parts of the policy be changed to reflect conditions that have changed since it was first enacted?” Finally, you can suggest improvements to the current policy. Together, all this work and the paper or presentation that resulted would fulfill the analytical function of verbal communication. Just as taking this communication class and learning how to analyze research and prepare speeches will improve your critical thinking skills and your ability to engage in effective use of the analytical function of language.<sup>8</sup>

### The Social Function

When your teacher stopped you on the way out of class to ask whether you were OK, she was demonstrating the **social function** of verbal communication, which refers to *the use of language to build and maintain relationships*. In your case the teacher was letting you know that she had noticed something about you (maybe that you looked down or tired) and that she cared. We also use verbal communication in a social way when we greet friends between classes, chat online, and text each other. The social function of language can have a positive impact on our emotional health, as in when we turn to social media for support and community with members of our online networks.<sup>9</sup>

One social function of language is achieved through **phatic communication**, *the most casual and often briefest exchanges that are intended to recognize the existence of another person and to demonstrate sociability rather than provide information*, as when you say “hi” in passing. Another social function is achieved through **trouble talk**, *exchanges in which people complain about something without expecting a solution*: “Things are awful at work under that new boss,” “My clothes hardly fit anymore,” and “I work too hard for too little.” A third way in which language functions socially is in **conflict management**, *the use of language to resolve issues between individuals or groups*. Spouses, partners, and friends, as well as union members and management, both create and solve conflicts with verbal communication.

Verbal communication used for social functions can have great benefits. In fact, research shows that students who are more socially active feel a greater sense of belonging, a benefit which correlates with higher levels of engagement, motivation, and achievement in college.<sup>10</sup>

## HOW WORDS COMMUNICATE

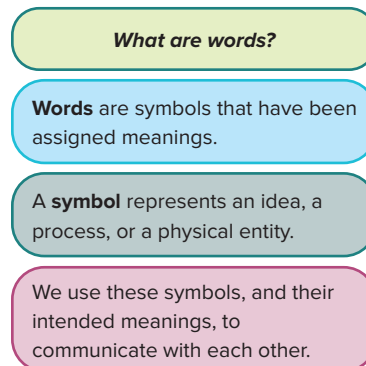
Verbal language, of course, is made up of words. But what is a word, and how does it communicate? Let’s begin with two definitions.



Laura Doss/Getty Images

As **Figure 2.1** shows, a **word** is a *symbol that has been assigned meaning*. A **symbol** represents an idea, a process, or a physical entity. For instance, the word *car* is a symbol that we have collectively come to agree stands for a vehicle of a certain type. However, over time words and symbols change and new ones are introduced.<sup>11</sup> For example, as some cars became more truck like and van like, we came up with new words to describe them—*SUV*, *wagon*, and *crossover*. The next section explains how we go about interpreting the words and symbols we encounter.

**Figure 2.1** What Are Words?



## Two Processes for Interpreting Messages

For words to have meaning, we have to produce and interpret them. To do this, we use the processes of encoding and decoding, as defined in Chapter 1:

- You encode when you translate your thoughts into words. You are wondering if you are doing your job well, so you translate that thought into words to your supervisor: “Did I do that correctly?” You have interpreted the word *correctly* as the one that best communicates your concern. You are saying that you are concerned about whether you are meeting the employer’s guidelines for a particular task. If you were concerned specifically with your speed, you could have asked, “Did I do that quickly enough?”
- When you decode, you assign meaning to someone else’s verbal communication, translating his words into thoughts of your own. Your supervisor says to you, “Doesn’t the cooking area need mopping?” You interpret his words to mean that he wants you to mop the cooking area, but you have to determine from the urgency in his voice whether he means “right now” or “anytime during this shift.” The “urgency in his voice” is a nonverbal feature that coordinates with the verbal to make the message. In either case, you assign meaning to the other person’s words. If, however, you decode the message to mean that it’s OK to wait a few hours before mopping the floor and your supervisor meant “right now,” you may make a bad impression. He, of course, could have encoded his message with more precision—for example, “Please mop the kitchen area now.”

Because language is an imperfect means of transmission, the thoughts that one person encodes never exactly match what the other decodes, so language often requires further interpretation or clarification, which you achieve when you ask, “Do you mean right now?” or “Can I do the mopping at the end of my shift?”

## Two Kinds of Meaning

Words can carry two kinds of meaning: denotative and connotative. **Denotative meaning** is the agreed-upon meaning, or the meaning you find in a dictionary. The *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* says a *cat* is “a carnivorous mammal long domesticated and kept by man as a pet or for catching rats or mice.” However, a dictionary meaning fails to capture your feelings for the felines you encounter in your life, which you may either adore or detest. Denotative meanings of words can be fluid, changing over time. For example, a primary meaning for the word *gay* was once *happy*, but now it also means homosexual; the word *troll* once referred to a mythological being, but its meaning has now expanded to include *to search* (as a verb) and *someone who deliberately provokes others on the Internet* (as a noun). The word *bandwidth* went from being a measure related to data transmission to one’s ability to handle intellectual or emotional issues.<sup>12</sup>

New words, and new denotative meanings, sometimes enter the language. Such terms are called **neologisms**, *new words or new meanings for old words that are in the process of entering common use*. New technologies create many neologisms, such as *app*, *tweet cred*, *hash tag*, and *404*. The last term, meaning clueless,



SKILL

## BUILDER

### PRACTICE EFFECTIVE VERBAL COMMUNICATION AND LISTENING SKILLS

One way to practice effective verbal communication is to interact with people who don't share your opinions. Identify someone who holds a differing opinion on a controversial issue and engage that person in a conversation in which you each exchange your thoughts and ideas. While you're talking and listening, practice the following recommendations from this chapter:

- **When you're unsure of your partner's meaning, stop and ask "What do you mean?"**
  - Listen for generalizations that lack fuller explanations.
  - Ask the other person to explain by saying, "I'm not sure I followed your argument, what did you mean when you said . . . ?" Doing so can help you learn more about the differing perspective without jumping to conclusions.
- **Take the opportunity to summarize the other person's major points in your own words.**
  - It is easy to misunderstand what other people have to say. Our interpretation of what we hear is informed by our personal experiences and worldviews. Even language choices can trigger misunderstandings.
  - When your partner has made an important point and explained their feelings on that point, stop and summarize: "I want to make sure I understood you correctly. When you were talking about this issue of . . . you said you feel . . . because. . ."
  - Often people will clarify and refine their arguments when given the opportunity. This type of perception checking demonstrates that you care enough to verify an accurate understanding of another's perspective.
- **Focus on understanding your partner's perspective rather than trying to get your own point across.**
  - By focusing on another person's point of view without interjecting your own feelings and opinions, you validate their right to an opinion and you gain a better understanding of their unique position.
  - When people feel like their opinions have been heard, they will be more open to listening to differing opinions.

Sometimes it isn't possible to resolve differences of opinion, especially when the issues at hand reflect beliefs that are deeply held. However, there are mutual benefits to talking through sensitive issues. By practicing effective verbal communication skills, we increase our understanding of others' perspectives and teach them more about our own.

came from the Web's notation for "document not found." Hence, when someone calls a person 404, the message is that the person is clueless.<sup>13</sup>

**Connotative meanings** are meanings people come to assign because of personal or individual experience. For example, the word *cat* holds vastly different meanings for people because of their unique experiences with that variety of animal: some

fill their homes with cats and pamper them as they would their children, whereas others suffer from serious allergies and swell up and itch at the sight of a cat. Another way to understand the difference between denotative and connotative meanings is to think, for example, of the word *mother*. Everyone knows what a mother is according to the denotative meaning. But each person has his own connotations for that word—laden with emotions that drown the denotative meaning in a flood of remembered experiences. Denotative meanings are general and shared, whereas connotative meanings tend to be individual and personal.

## THE RULES OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The way you use words is often determined by the situation you are in. That is, you adapt your speech depending on where you are, whom you are with, and what the context is. Multiple rules and practices guide communication—some that you follow without even being aware of them, others that can benefit you as you gain awareness of them. These are the topics we turn to in this section.

### Rules Regarding Place

You may already know that where you are affects the way you speak and the words you choose. When you are at home, where people know you well, you can be very informal and make certain assumptions—for example, that people will know what you mean by “the back room” or “that story Dad always tells.” When you are out with friends, the formal rules of verbal communication may become extremely relaxed, because friends tend not to be very critical about your language. Among friends you can talk about topics you never would talk about at work, such as your love life, and you may not be so careful about the language you use.

When you are in the more formal setting of a classroom, however, you tend to be more careful with your speech, because you want to make a good impression on your professor. You also adapt your speech when you enter a place of worship—a church, synagogue, or mosque—and you speak differently at a funeral than you do in a bar. Certain places—courtrooms, for example—have strict and extensive rules and practices related to verbal communication and appropriate speech, especially related to tone and volume. In other places, the rules may be less clear—if you begin a loud argument in a restaurant, you may be asked to leave, but if you shout in a sports bar during an exciting game, you’ll fit right in. Finally, when giving a public speech or when being interviewed for a job, you are under the most pressure of all to follow the formal rules of language and choose your words with care.

### Rules Regarding Conversational Partners

Knowing how and when to adapt your verbal communication based on your relationship with your conversational partner is part of being an effective communicator. Close relationships with family and friends allow the greatest latitude in terms of the formal rules of grammar and word choice, but even in these





## GLOBALLY

### CONNECTING

#### FOCUS ON YOURSELF—OR NOT—THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

In the dominant culture in the United States, it is standard social practice to make oneself the focus of conversation. In keeping with this norm, Americans tend to use social media to highlight their own personal and professional accomplishments.

But using social media to focus on the self is not common to all cultures. For example, in collectivistic cultures, people are more likely to use social media to highlight group or team accomplishments. In South Korea, for example, where modesty is highly valued, a person using social media might even downplay their own credentials. Differences in individual freedoms likewise influence social media use. Some Eastern cultures are denied certain freedoms of expression. This factor can limit, and in some cases prohibit, the use of social media.

Consider for a moment your own uses for social media. How often do your posts include details about your daily life? Have you ever taken a photograph of yourself to post to social media, a practice referred to, appropriately, as “taking a selfie”? Do you see these behaviors as a reflection of your culture?

close circles, profanity, sex, and various other topics may be taboo. Verbal communication with authority figures—for example, professors, police, and upper-level management—introduces a number of language restrictions and adaptations. Because of the differences in status, you likely know that you want to sound intelligent and well informed with your professor, you don’t want to rile a police officer by saying anything that sounds rude or threatening, and you want to be respectful and emphasize your competence and commitment when speaking to your boss.

These rules don’t only apply to face-to-face exchanges. When you communicate with your professor via e-mail, for example, you should use a formal tone. Begin with an appropriate opening (Dear Professor Franklin), put a clear description in the subject line (question about Wednesday’s assignment), let your professor know which class you’re in, write in complete sentences, avoid the abbreviations you use for texting with your friends, make your message clear and direct, review it for typos, and end with an appropriate salutation (Sincerely, Alison Corsino). Your professor will appreciate the respect you show with your businesslike tone and the care you took to craft a clear message.



Brand X Pictures/Getty Images

#### Rules of Engagement

As noted previously, verbal communication comes to us loaded with rules about what can be said to whom, under what circumstances, and how it



should be said. In addition, verbal communication comes with **rules of engagement**—*rules about initiating, conducting, and ending a verbal exchange.*

By convention, a public speech begins with an introduction that reveals something about the speaker and the topic. In one-to-one conversation, certain conventions have been established as to who can initiate the exchange—sometimes based on status or gender. For example, at a party or a bar, men are often expected to initiate a conversation with women, although such conventions have loosened up somewhat; in some business contexts, managers initiate meetings with those they supervise, rather than vice versa. In a very formal setting, like a courtroom, the judge is usually the only person who can initiate or permit an exchange, as when she asks questions of lawyers or jurors.

In addition, both public speeches and conversations follow particular organizational patterns. In a public speech the body, or main points, follows the introduction, whereas in a conversation turn taking begins. **Turn taking** means that *one person speaks and the other responds with a certain amount of give and take.* Usually, the signal that one person has said his piece is that he stops talking, so that the other person can respond, but sometimes the first speaker is only pausing to collect his thoughts, in which case the two speakers may have some awkward moments of speaking over each other as they try to determine whose turn it is or one says, “No, you.”

Another aspect of language rules is called **code switching**, which means *shifting from one treatment of language to another based on the audience and place.*<sup>14</sup> A common case of code switching occurs when politicians alter their word choices, or even their accents, to appeal to a particular voting base. Another case of code switching occurs when college students talk one way to each other but another way in the presence of their professor. All of us know how to do some code switching depending on the place or audience.

In the context of the rules of engagement, nonverbal indicators can also act as signals between conversational partners. For example, a listener may nod to indicate understanding or encouragement or may look away to indicate distraction or boredom. Conversations can vary considerably in length, but when one person wants to stop the conversation, he signals this message either verbally or nonverbally—for example, saying, “Well, I’ve got to go now,” or getting up to leave and putting on his coat. As with all other phases of a conversation, ending one can have its awkward aspects—as in the case that one person wants to continue talking but the other doesn’t. All in all, we have multiple signals—subtle and overt—that we use in starting, continuing, and ending conversations. Moreover, as discussed earlier, we adapt our verbal behavior based on where we are and to whom we’re talking.



Paul Burns/Getty Images

## WORDS TO AVOID

Another set of rules to make you a more effective communicator focuses on choosing the right words and avoiding the wrong ones. Remember that your word choices affect your credibility. Whether you are at work, with friends, or

in the classroom, an ill-chosen word can make a difference; for instance, in the fall of 2020, a tenured professor and the chair of the Journalism Department at Central Michigan University was fired for creating a hostile work environment because of his use of both racist and homophobic words in the classroom.<sup>15</sup> The following sections describe some categories of words that can get you in trouble with your classmates, work colleagues, and even friends and family.

### Profanity

**Profanity** is language that is vulgar, abusive, or disrespectful of things sacred. Many so-called swear words have a religious origin: *hell* and *damn* are examples. Inappropriate use of the words *God* and *Jesus* to express irritation or incredulity can also be considered disrespectful and offensive. Other forms of profanity refer to forbidden statuses or acts: “son of a \_\_\_\_” or “Mother \_\_\_\_.” Many people find profanity offensive, so using such words can get you in trouble, especially with people you don’t know. Even the Internet has rules about the use of profanity. A note on eBay, for example, says, “We don’t allow hateful, offensive, profane, or vulgar language in almost all public areas of the website.”

Some people think that profanity is never appropriate, but usage varies by place, age, and sex. Although everyone seems to know that swearing is inappropriate in a place of worship, profanity is fairly common on many college campuses and at athletic events. Also, those in their eighties and nineties seem to have less tolerance for profanity than do middle-aged and younger people. And men tend to cuss more than women. Profanity has become so common that once-forbidden words are so overused that they have lost their impact.

But since you can’t be certain what those around you—at school, at work, in an audience, or in your social circle—really think about such words, and they may judge you harshly if you use them, think carefully before you use words that are potentially offensive.



O. Dimier/PhotoAlto

### Sexist Words

**Sexist language** is language that excludes individuals on the basis of gender. The statement “A professor needs to read incessantly to keep up with his field” suggests that all professors are men. A nonsexist way to express this thought is “Professors need to read incessantly to keep up with their fields.” People reveal sexism when they assume that all members of any category are all male or all female—for example, that all criminals are male or that all nurses are female. Sexist language also appears in many gender-specific compound words, such as *chairman* and *salesman*; instead, use the term *chair* or *salesperson*.

The use of sexist language varies by sex, with more women than men being victimized by sexist talk. In particular, the vast majority of hostile workplace charges come from women charging men with an offense. Sexism also varies by region. In some parts

of the United States a female server might call a man “honey” without meaning anything much, whereas in other parts of the country that word might be seen as flirtatious or at least too personal to use with a stranger. And sexism can vary by age. Younger people are often more attuned to the offenses that accompany sexist language. An older generation may use profanity less but exhibit more sexist language. In any case, speakers in conversation or on the stage need to be aware that sexist words can get a person in trouble, sometime career-killing trouble.

Career-killing trouble comes when words create a hostile workplace. The Federal Communications Commission explains the situation this way: **“Hostile work environment harassment occurs when unwelcome comments or conduct based on sex, race or other legally protected characteristics unreasonably interferes with an employee’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.”**<sup>16</sup>

### Racist Words

**Racist language** is language that is insulting because it associates skin color or ethnicity with stereotypical and usually negative characteristics. The concepts of race and ethnicity—as well as stereotypes and prejudice—are discussed in detail in Chapter 6, on global and intercultural communication. Needless to say, racial and ethnic insults and labels are common in society. Also common is the debate about who is entitled to use certain labels. The standard rule is that, even though people within a race or an ethnic group may use such words with or about each other, that does not give outsiders permission to use them, and when they do, it can be deeply offensive.

So what should you do when someone around you uses an offensive racial or ethnic term or makes a racist “joke” in your presence? If you find a comment offensive, an appropriate response is, first, to refrain from laughing at the joke and, second, to tell the speaker that you find the comment offensive and why. These are not easy things to do, however—especially if the person who made the joke has more power than you do, like your boss. Even among friends, it can be difficult to call someone out on bad behavior. The same applies to sexist language and sexist “jokes.” Learning how to navigate such difficulties can take time and experience. The more tuned in you are to the damage that such language can do, the better you will become at responding when you hear it.

### Ageist Words

**Ageist language** is language that denigrates people based on their age, whether young or old. Classifying every young person as a *child* or a *kid* may be both offensive and inaccurate; referring to someone as a *young person*, an *adolescent*, or a *young adult* is more descriptive and precise. Ageism is also evident in language that infantilizes older persons and diminishes their status as vigorous and vital individuals. Older people may not think of themselves as old and may not appreciate being referred to as senior citizens or the elderly.<sup>17</sup> The key is to be



## COMMUNICATION IN ACTION

### Reflection about Use of Ageist Language

*Being an international student in the United States has opened my eyes to how culture can impact the way we use language casually in ways that are inappropriate and ageist. In China, you would never hear a group of younger people refer to their grandparents with terms like “old geezer,” “gramps,” “old fogey,” or “old fart.” In my culture, grandparents and older adults are respected for their wisdom, knowledge, and experience in life. I realize these terms are inappropriate in both cultures but I rarely heard them used until coming here.*

Li Jie

Marketing Major

respectful and thoughtful about applying labels and consider whether you need to refer to people’s age at all—or for that matter, their sex, race, or ethnicity—when addressing them or speaking or writing about them. For example, journalists are trained to describe a subject by race, age, or ethnicity *only* if it is clearly relevant to the story they are presenting.

Recently, an increase in use of ageist language has been occurring during the pandemic. This is due to an increase in news reports and social media accounts where some people’s language choices reflect devaluing the lives of older adults. Older adults can be more susceptible to the COVID-19 virus. Some have said they see older adults as reasonable “sacrifices” to the virus, which is inappropriate thinking and use of ageist language. To combat ageist language, the American Psychological Association encourages people to be self-aware of our own ageist language choices, speak out against ageism, remember that older adults as a category are diverse, to pay attention to nuances in data, and spread accurate information.<sup>18</sup>

### Power of Words

While there are many words that you should avoid, there are also ways that you can use language to increase the impact of your message. Persuasive punch words are words used strategically to convey a more powerful message. For example, in a speech, rather than saying “let’s now look at the impact of climate change on things like wildfires” you might instead include a few punch words that set a more serious tone for the topic. For example, “let’s look at the devastating impact that climate change has had on decimating lively forested areas because of increased incidences of raging wildfires.” Use of words like “devastating,” “decimating,” and “raging” create a more powerful tone to the issue of