COMMUNICATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

THIRD EDITION

A Survey of Communication

STEVE DUCK • DAVID T. McMAHAN

Students Can Relate to Communication in Everyday Life

"[This book] was definitely engaging, and every sentence made me want to continue. . . . I love how [this book] relates to the reader."

—Student
Washburn University

"I have had numerous comments on the readability and tone of the text—students say they actually enjoy reading it!"

—Martha Antolik
Wright State University

Whether we are talking or texting, persuading or posting, turn-taking or tweeting, relationships play an essential role in all of the ways we choose to communicate throughout the day.

We continuously manage and enact our relationships in our daily communication. In ***Communication in Everyday Life: A Survey of Communication***, authors Steve Duck and David T. McMahan highlight the inseparable connection between relationships and communication in every chapter to add insight and coherence to the full range of foundational communication concepts, theories, and skills covered in the introductory course. The third edition includes updated examples, the latest research, and enhanced learning tools that will encourage students to think critically, to relate communication theory to their everyday experiences, and to improve their communication skills in the process.

Effective, Classroom-Tested Learning Tools:

- **Engaging pedagogy** in every chapter encourages critical thinking, links material to students' own experiences, and applies chapter concepts to their own personal and professional lives.
- **Analyzing Everyday Communication** boxes focus on critical analysis of real-life exchanges and relationships.
- **Communication and You** boxes provide opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment in each chapter.
- **Make Your Case** boxes provide students with an opportunity to develop their own positions or to perform an exercise related to the material.

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THIRD EDITION

A Survey of Communication

From Steve:
To Zach and Minnie, just starting to read about the relational world

From David:
To Jennifer always

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THIRD EDITION

STEVE DUCK

DAVID T. McMAHAN

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Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044
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3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Duck, Steve, author. | McMahan, David T., author.

Title: Communication in everyday life : a survey of communication / Steve Duck, David T. McMahan.

Description: Third edition. | Thousand Oaks, Calif. : SAGE, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016037014 | ISBN 9781506315164 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Communication. | Public speaking.

Classification: LCC P90.D8334 2017 | DDC 302.2—dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016037014

Acquisitions Editor: Karen Omer
Development Editor: Anna Villarruel
Editorial Assistant: Sarah Dillard
eLearning Editor: Gabrielle Piccininni
Production Editor: Tracy Buyan
Copy Editor: Robin Gold
Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.
Proofreader: Lawrence Baker
Indexer: Scott Smiley
Cover and Interior Designer: Scott Van Atta
Marketing Manager: Amy Lammers

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

17 18 19 20 21 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

BRIEF CONTENTS

Preface xv
A Personal Note to Readers xx
Acknowledgments xxii
About the Authors xxv

PART I. COMMUNICATION FOUNDATIONS 1

1. An Overview of Communication 2
2. Histories and Contexts of Communication 20

PART II. COMMUNICATION SKILLS 45

3. Identities, Perceptions, and Communication 46
4. Verbal Communication 68
5. Nonverbal Communication 90
6. Culture and Communication 114
7. Listening 134

PART III. COMMUNICATION CONTEXTS 153

8. Personal Relationships 154
9. Family Communication 176
10. Groups and Leaders 190
11. Communication in the Workplace 210
12. Health Communication 228
13. Technology and Media in Everyday Life 248
14. Public and Personal Influence 274
15. Interviewing 296

Glossary 331
References 340
Index 353

DETAILED CONTENTS

Preface xv
A Personal Note to Readers xx
Acknowledgments xxii
About the Authors xxv

PART I. COMMUNICATION FOUNDATIONS 1

Chapter 1 An Overview of Communication 2

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Focus Questions 3
Everyday Communication and the Relational Perspective 3
What Is Communication? 5
Communication Is Symbolic 7
Communication Requires Meaning 8
Social Construction of Meaning 9
Meaning and Context 9
Verbal and Nonverbal Influence on Meaning 10
Meaning and the Medium 10
Communication Is Cultural 11
Communication Is Relational 11
Communication Involves Frames 12
Coordinating Interactions 13
Assigning Meanings 13
Perspectives 13
Communication Is Both Presentational and Representational 14
Communication Is a Transaction 15
Communication as Action 16
Communication as Interaction 16
Communication as Transaction 17
Focus Questions Revisited 18
Key Concepts 18
Questions to Ask Your Friends 19
Media Connections 19

Chapter 2 Histories and Contexts of Communication 20

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Focus Questions 21
The Challenges of Writing History 22
The Development of a Discipline 23
The Emergence of Areas of Study 24
Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism 25
Interpersonal Communication 25
Mass Communication 26

Coming Together (Kind of) as Communication Studies 27
Future of Communication and the Relational Perspective 28
Methods of Studying Communication 28
Social Scientific Approach 30
Assumptions 30
Methods 30
Advantages 31
Disadvantages 31
Interpretivist Approach 32
Assumptions 32
Methods 32
Advantages 34
Disadvantages 34
Critical Approach 35
Assumptions 35
Methods 35
Advantages 36
Disadvantages 36
Improving Communication Studies Through the Relational Perspective 37
Communication Education and Instructional Communication 37
Cultural Communication 37
Family Communication 38
Group Communication 38
Interpersonal Communication 38
Media 38
Health Communication 39
Organizational Communication 39
Persuasion 40
Political Communication 40
Public Relations 41
Rhetorical Criticism 41
Where Next? 41
Focus Questions Revisited 42
Key Concepts 43
Questions to Ask Your Friends 43
Media Connections 43

PART II. COMMUNICATION SKILLS 45

Chapter 3 Identities, Perceptions, and Communication 46

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Focus Questions 47
Do People Have Core Selves? 49
Different Moods 51
Different Situations 51
Different Relationships 51
Different Evaluations 51
Identities and Perceptions 52
Selecting 52
Organizing, Interpreting, and Evaluating 54
Identities and Communication 55
Symbolic Identities and a Symbolic Self 55
Self-Disclosure 57
Dynamics of Self-Disclosure 59
Narratives 61
Transacting Identity and Other People 62
Altercasting 63
Self as Others Treat You 63
Performative Self 64
Focus Questions Revisited 65
Key Concepts 66
Questions to Ask Your Friends 66
Media Connections 66

Chapter 4 Verbal Communication 68

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Focus Questions 69
How Is Verbal Communication Symbolic? 70
Verbal Communication Involves Meaning 71
Denotative and Connotative Meanings 71
Words and Values 72
Verbal Communication Is Relational 73

Relationships Regulate Verbal Communication 74
Relationships and Shared Meanings 74
Verbal Communication Is Cultural 76
Verbal Communication Transacts Cultures 76
Cultures Regulate Verbal Communication 76
Cultural Ways of Talking 76
Verbal Communication and Frames 77
Recognizing Frames 78
Ways of Speaking 79
Accommodation: Adjusting Relational Frames 79
Verbal Communication Is Presentational 80
Telling Stories 80
Kenneth Burke's Pentad 81
Functions of Verbal Communication 83
Influencing Others: Facework and Politeness 83
Relationships and Everyday Talk 86
Instrumental Function 86
Indexical Function 86
Essential Function 86
Focus Questions Revisited 87
Key Concepts 88
Questions to Ask Your Friends 88
Media Connections 89

Chapter 5 Nonverbal Communication 90

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Focus Questions 91
Misconceptions About Nonverbal Communication 92
Misconception One: 93% of Meaning Comes From Nonverbal Communication 92
Misconception Two: Some Nonverbal Communication Is Universally Understood 93
Misconception Three: Deception Can Be Accurately Detected Through Nonverbal Communication 93
Misconception Four: People Read Nonverbal Communication 94
What Is Nonverbal Communication? 94
Symbolic 94
Decoding and Encoding 94
Dynamic and Static 95
Guided by Rules 96
Cultural 96
Personal 96
Multichanneled 96
Ambiguous 97
Less Controlled 97
Continuous 98
The Functions of Nonverbal Communication 98
Interconnects With Verbal Communication 98
Regulates Interactions 99
Identifies Individuals 99
Transmits Emotional Information 100
Relational Meaning and Understanding 101
Types of Nonverbal Communication 101
Environment 101
Proxemics 103
Personal Space and Distance 105
Kinesics 106
Eye Contact and Gaze 107
Vocalics 109
Chronemics 110
Haptics 110
Focus Questions Revisited 112
Key Concepts 112
Questions to Ask Your Friends 113
Media Connections 113

Chapter 6 Culture and Communication 114

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Focus Questions 115
How Can Culture Be Identified and Studied? 117
Culture as Structure 117
Culture as Transacted 118
Coded Systems of Meaning 119

Structure-Based Cultural Characteristics 119
Context 120
Collectivism/Individualism 121
Time 123
Conflict 124
Transacting Culture 127
Culture Is Embedded Within Your Communication 128
Culture Goes Beyond Physical Location 129
Cultural Groups Are Created Through Communication 129
Cultural Membership Is Enacted Through Communication 130
Focus Questions Revisited 131
Key Concepts 132
Questions to Ask Your Friends 133
Media Connections 133

Chapter 7 Listening 134

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Focus Questions 135
Why Is Listening Important? 136
Listening and Education 136
Listening and Career 137
Listening and Religion and Spirituality 137
Listening and Health Care 137
Listening and Relationships 137
Listening Objectives 138
Active Listening 138
Engaged and Relational Listening 139
Disengaged Listening 140
Engaged Listening for a Transactional World 140
Relational Listening 141
Critical Listening 142
Elements of Critical Listening 142
Recognizing and Overcoming Listening Obstacles 145
Focus Questions Revisited 149
Key Concepts 150
Questions to Ask Your Friends 150
Media Connections 151

PART III. COMMUNICATION CONTEXTS 153

Chapter 8 Personal Relationships 154

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Focus Questions 155
What Are Personal Relationships? 156
Benefits of Personal Relationships 156
Relationships and What You Know 157
Relationships and Support 158
Initiating Relationships: The Relationship Filtering Model 160
Talking to Strangers 160
Steps in the Relationship Filtering Model 160
Transacting and Maintaining Personal Relationships 163
Composing Relationships Through Communication 164
Keeping Relationships Going Through Communication 165
Relational Dialectics 166
Coming Apart 168
Symptoms and Sources of Decline 168
Breakdown Process Model 171
Focus Questions Revisited 174
Key Concepts 175
Questions to Ask Your Friends 175
Media Connections 175

Chapter 9 Family Communication 176

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Focus Questions 177
Families as . . . 178
Families as Structures 178
Families as Systems 179
Families as Transacted Relationships 181
Change and Development in Family Processes 184
Immediate Change in Families 185
Gradual Change in Families 185
Families Communicate! 186
Focus Questions Revisited 187
Key Concepts 188
Questions to Ask Your Friends 188
Media Connections 188

Chapter 10 Groups and Leaders 190

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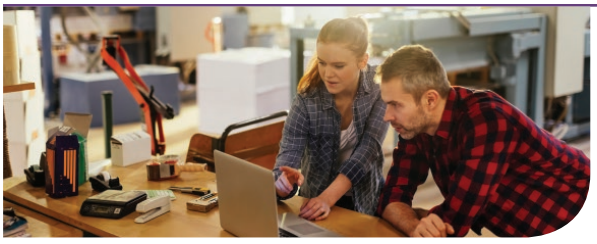
Focus Questions 191
What Is a Group? 191
Types of Groups 192
Characteristics of Groups 192
Cohesiveness 193
Interdependence 194
Commitment 195
Group Norms 196
Member Roles 196
Group Culture 198
Group Development and Decision Making 198
Group Decision Making Is About Relationships 200
Leadership 200
Leadership Styles 202
Leadership Power 203
Leadership Vision 204
Leadership Ethics 205
Leadership Is Transacted 206
Focus Questions Revisited 207
Key Concepts 207
Questions to Ask Your Friends 208
Media Connections 208

Chapter 11 Communication in the Workplace 210



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Focus Questions 211
Learning About the Workplace 212
Vocational Anticipatory Socialization 212
Metaphors of Organizations 213
Going to Work: The Workplace as a Special Frame 214
Workplace Goals 215
Workplace Formality/Hierarchy 215
Workplace Identities 216
The Workplace as a Culture 217
Workplace Routine and Structuration Theory 217
Industrial Time 219
The Workplace as Relationships 219
Positive Influences of Relationships at Work 220
Relationships and Workplace Challenges 221
Focus Questions Revisited 225
Key Concepts 226
Questions to Ask Your Friends 226
Media Connections 226

Chapter 12 Health Communication 228

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Focus Questions 229
Patient and Provider Relationships 230
Patient–Provider Identities 230
How Patients and Providers Communicate 231
Improving Patient–Provider Communication 232
Benefits of Effective Patient–Provider Relationships 232
Social Networks and Health 234
Social Networks and Health and Lifestyles 234
Social Networks and Support 236
Secondary Goals of Social Support 238
Everyday Communication and the Foundation of Social Support 238
Communication Privacy Management 240
Media, Technology, and Health 241
Entertainment Media and Health 241
News Media and Health 242
Advertising Medications 243
Health Communication and the Internet 244
Focus Questions Revisited 245
Key Concepts 246
Questions to Ask Your Friends 246
Media Connections 247

Chapter 13 Technology and Media in Everyday Life 248

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Focus Questions 249
Perceptions of Technology and Media 250
Cave Drawings and Other Concerns 250
Every Technology Is Relational 250
Impact of Technology 251
The Relational Uses of Technology and Media 253
The Use of Technology and Media Is a Shared Relational Activity 253
Technology and Media Inform People About Relationships 253
Technology and Media Function as Alternatives to Personal Relationships 255
Technology and Media Are Used in Everyday Talk 257
Smartphones: Constructing Identities and Relationships 260
Constructing Identities Using Smartphones 261
Relating Through Smartphones 263
Constructing Identities and Maintaining Relationships Online 265
Social Networking Sites and the Construction of Identities 265
Online Communication and Relationships 268
Focus Questions Revisited 271
Key Concepts 272
Questions to Ask Your Friends 272
Media Connections 272

Chapter 14 Public and Personal Influence 274

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Focus Questions 275
Public Address and Relating to Audiences 276
Analyzing Audiences 276
Presentations to Convince and Presentations to Actuate 279
Sequential Persuasion 281
Foot in the Door 282
Door in the Face 283
Pregiving 284
Emotional Appeals 284
Fear: Buy This Book and No One Gets Hurt! 286

Guilt: Have You Ever Seen Two Grown Professors Cry? 287
Lost Emotions 288
Compliance Gaining 288
Relational Influence Goals 288
Secondary Goals of Compliance Gaining 289
Compliance-Gaining Strategies 289
Focus Questions Revisited 293
Key Concepts 294
Questions to Ask Your Friends 295
Media Connections 295

Chapter 15 Interviewing 296

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Focus Questions 297
Preparing for an Interview 298
Cover Letters and Résumés 298
Résumés 299
Interviews 301
Characteristics of an Interview 301
Types of Interviews 302
Pre-Interview Responsibilities 304
Interviewer Responsibilities 304
Interviewee Responsibilities 306
Beginning an Employment Interview 309
Greeting and Establishing Appropriate Proxemics 309
Negotiating Relational Connection and Tone 310
Establishing Purpose and Agenda 311
Asking the Questions During an Employment Interview 311
Primary and Secondary Questions 312
Open and Closed Questions 312
Neutral and Leading Questions 313
Directive and Nondirective Questioning 314
Avoiding Illegal Questions 315
Answering the Questions During an Employment Interview 315
Adjusting the Interview Frame 315
Learning From Successful and Unsuccessful Interviewees 317
Answering Common Questions 318
Dealing With Illegal Questions 321
Concluding an Employment Interview 321
Interviewer Responsibilities 322
Interviewee Responsibilities 323
Post-Interview Responsibilities 324
Interviewer Responsibilities 324
Interviewee Responsibilities 325
Focus Questions Revisited 327
Key Concepts 328
Questions to Ask Your Friends 328
Media Connections 328

Glossary 331
References 340
Index 353

PREFACE

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

This book, therefore, includes discussions of material traditionally included in such textbooks. However, it also includes material conspicuously absent from other textbooks but increasingly relevant in the everyday lives of students, such as the continued relational integration of media and technology along with global influences. Further, the book allows all of these topics to cohere and coalesce by pointing out the *relational* basis of all communication as a major feature of students' everyday lives.

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

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

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

Everyday Communication and a Relational Perspective

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

The isolation of topics provides students with an artificial and unrealistic view of actual communication. It specifically obscures the interrelated nature of communication. For example, completely separating personal relationships and media conceals the fact that in real life such media as television, video games, and the Internet are often used and consumed in the (increasingly virtual) company of others, convey information about relationships, and serve as topics of everyday talk. Likewise, social media are explicitly used to conduct and maintain relationships, while health care and social support are based in relationship activity.

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

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

When it comes to a unifying theme, *everyday communication* and a *relational perspective* will guide our exploration of communication.

Everyday Communication

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

In actuality, most of a person's life experiences and interactions with others are of the everyday, seemingly ordinary, and seemingly dull variety. This everyday communication might include brief conversations while getting ready for school or work, a quick text message between classes, or talking while watching video clips online (or sharing those clips as a means of expressing common interests and relationship). The content of these interactions might include schedules, the weather, what to eat, or any other seemingly mundane topic.

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

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

Relational Perspective

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

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

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

Pedagogical Features

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

Overview

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

Chapter Boxes

The main body of the chapters includes the following pedagogical boxes: (1) Analyzing Everyday Communication, (2) By the Way, (3) Communication + You, (4) Disciplinary Debate, (5) Ethical Issue, (6) Make Your Case, and (7) Skills You Can Use. With the exception of Ethical Issue and Skills You Can Use boxes, each of these boxes includes questions for students to further consider what is being discussed.

Analyzing Everyday Communication boxes encourage students to apply what they have learned in the analysis of everyday life situations. For instance, the culture chapter (Chapter 6) asks students to go to a public space where members of a unique cultural group are gathered and observe the ways they communicate.

By the Way boxes appear multiple times within each chapter and present students with additional information to ponder as they study the material. These boxes will enhance student interest in the material by providing unique or bonus information about what is being discussed. For example, the verbal communication chapter (Chapter 4) introduces students to Taa, perhaps the world's most complicated language with 112 distinct sounds.

Communication + You boxes ask students to consider the material in relation to their lives and lived experiences. Specifically, this feature will sensitize students to issues and encourage them to become careful observers of the activities and events going on in their lives, compelling them to examine and apply the material. For instance, the health communication chapter (Chapter 12) asks students to be aware of how their next conversation gets framed through talk.

Disciplinary Debate boxes encourage critical thinking by asking students to consider competing views within communication scholarship or positions that counter those presented in the text. For example, in the personal relationships chapter (Chapter 8), students are asked to consider whether relationships actually develop and end in stages as textbooks so often claim.

Ethical Issue boxes urge students to contemplate and develop a position regarding ethical quandaries that arise in communication. For instance, the technology and media chapter (Chapter 13) asks students to consider whether employers should use material on social networking sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, when making hiring decisions.

Make Your Case boxes provide students with opportunities to develop their own positions or to provide a personal example about the material. For example, in the listening chapter (Chapter 7), students are asked to provide and respond to a time when they encountered problems with listening involving customer service.

Skills You Can Use boxes present students with guides to integrate the material into their lives. For instance, the groups chapter (Chapter 10) discusses how recognizing the relational elements of a group can assist them when promoting a particular agenda or decision.

Photographs

Photographs included in each chapter also serve as pedagogical tools. Each photo caption is stated in the form of a question that corresponds with material being discussed. Students will be asked to examine the photograph and answer the accompanying question based on their understanding of the material. Rather than being open-ended, these questions have specific answers that appear on the student study site: https://edge.sagepub.com/duckciel3e.

End-of-Chapter Pedagogical Materials

Each chapter also ends with pedagogical materials that bring the overview and focus questions full circle. Focus Questions Revisited are implemented as a way of summarizing chapter material via pedagogical structure rather than as a simple (and usually ignored) chapter summary. Also, instead of including review questions, which often serve only to establish lower levels of comprehension, each chapter includes (a) Questions to Ask Your Friends and (b) Media Connections. These features enable students to further examine how the chapter material fits within their communicative lives as a whole. Questions to Ask Your Friends provide students with questions to ask their friends to further increase their awareness of the material and integrate it into their lives. In the culture chapter (Chapter 6), for example, students are encouraged to ask their friends about what was challenging and what was rewarding about recent intercultural experiences. Media Connections lead students to draw from media to further explore the issues discussed in each chapter. For example, the personal relationships chapter (Chapter 8) instructs students to examine the Sunday newspaper section of marriages, engagements, and commitment ceremonies for similarities in attractiveness.

Conversational Tone

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

Instructor Support

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

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- **Answers** to in-text photo caption questions

A PERSONAL NOTE TO READERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, we believe that ancillary materials such as self-quizzes, activities, and Internet resources should be developed to benefit students, new instructors, and experienced instructors alike. We also wanted to ensure that these ancillary materials were available to *all* students and not just those students purchasing a new copy of the book rather than a used copy of the book.

To substantiate, challenge, and build on these beliefs, we engaged in extensive discussions with our fellow course instructors and directors as well as students throughout the United States and other countries. We wanted to know what

they needed in a textbook, what worked and did not work with previous textbooks, and what innovations must be included. Primarily because of their input and encouragement during all facets of its development and production, the first edition of *Communication in Everyday Life: A Survey of Communication* was met with an overwhelmingly positive response. These discussions continued once the first edition was published and remained fundamental in the development and production of the second edition and beyond.

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

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

—Steve and David

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

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

We also wish to extend our warm appreciation to the extraordinary people at SAGE Publications who have assisted in bringing this book into existence and for their confidence in this book's capability of being a meaningful tool for student learning and a positive influence in the discipline.

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

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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

David T. McMahan has taught courses that span the discipline of communication, including numerous courses in interpersonal communication and personal relationships, media and technology, communication education, theory, and criticism. David's research interests also engage multiple areas of the discipline with much of his research devoted to bridging the study of relationships, technology, and media. This work encompasses discussions of media and technology in everyday communication, the incorporation of catchphrases and media references in everyday communication, and the relational aspects of the Internet and digital media. His diverse research experiences also include studies on symbolic displays of masculinity and violence in rural America, media-based political transformations of the world's nation-states, the reporting of mass-murder suicide in *The New York Times*, and primetime animated series. In addition to authoring numerous books, his work has appeared in such journals as *Review of Communication, Communication Education, and Communication Quarterly*, as well as edited volumes. A tremendously active member of the discipline, David's endeavors include serving on a number of editorial review boards, serving as editor of the *Iowa Journal of Communication*, and serving as president of the Central States Communication Association. He has also received multiple awards for his work in the classroom and has been the recipient of a number of public service and academic distinctions, including being named a *Centennial Scholar* by the Eastern Communication Association. He hopes to someday win the singles championship at Wimbledon.

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PART I
Communication Foundations

CHAPTER 1
An Overview of Communication

CHAPTER 2
Histories and Contexts of Communication

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Chapter Outline

Everyday Communication and the Relational Perspective
What Is Communication?
Communication Is Symbolic
Communication Requires Meaning
- Social Construction of Meaning
- Meaning and Context
- Verbal and Nonverbal Influence on Meaning
- Meaning and the Medium

Communication Is Cultural
Communication Is Relational
Communication Involves Frames
- Coordinating Interactions
- Assigning Meanings
- Perspectives

Communication Is Both Presentational and Representational
Communication Is a Transaction
- Communication as Action
- Communication as Interaction
- Communication as Transaction

Focus Questions Revisited
Key Concepts
Questions to Ask Your Friends
Media Connections

1 An Overview of Communication

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

We are passionate about the study of communication, and we believe very strongly that you can benefit from knowing more about how communication works. We wrote this book partly because we believe that everyone needs to know more about communication. *Communication in Everyday Life* will help you better understand—and even improve—your life through better understanding of communication.

Everyday Communication and the Relational Perspective

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

In actuality, most interactions of romantic partners are of the everyday, seemingly ordinary, or even seemingly dull variety. This everyday communication might include brief conversations as they get ready for work or school, a quick phone call or text between classes or during a break, talking in the car while in traffic, or chatting while watching television or videos online. The

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What are symbols?
2. How is meaning established?
3. How is communication cultural?
4. How is communication relational?
5. What are communication frames?
6. What does it mean to view communication as both representational and presentational?
7. What does it mean to view communication as a transaction?

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Is the connection between relationships and communication really that significant?

content of these conversations is seemingly mundane and may include topics such as schedules, weather, what to eat, what to watch on television, what bills need paying, or the source of a foul odor.

Everyday communication may not always be memorable, but it does *constitute* (i.e., compose) a person's life, and it happens to be incredibly important. Major portions of a person's life take shape through routine, seemingly mundane everyday communication. Everyday communication creates, maintains, challenges, and alters relationships and identities as well as culture, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, meaning, and even reality. Everyday communication should be studied not just because of its frequency in our lives but also because extraordinary things happen through everyday communication. When discussing all types of communication, we will continuously interconnect them with your everyday life and experiences.

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

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

We sincerely believe that your life as a student, friend, romantic partner, colleague, and family member can be improved through the study of communication. Whatever your purpose in reading this book, and whatever your

By the way . . .

Citing Sources

You will notice that when we refer to someone else's work or ideas, we will list the surname of the author(s), a date, and a page number when quoting the author(s) directly. The date gives the year in which the original paper or book was published, and the page number is where the original quote can be located. This format is used in most social science textbooks and professional writing, with the full reference at the end of each chapter or at the end of the book. You may also be asked to use this format when you write your own papers or speeches.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why do you suppose including references is so important?
2. Why would it be necessary for scholars to follow the same format when citing references?

ultimate goal in life, we hope that it will enrich your life by sharpening your abilities to observe and understand communication activities going on around you.

What Is Communication?

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

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

One fact that makes the study of communication unique, compared with, say, chemistry, is that you have been communicating your entire life. Previous experience with this topic can be beneficial because you will be able to draw from relationships and events in your own life when studying the material. You will even be able to apply the material—and, we hope, improve your communication abilities and life in general along the way.

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

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

Make your case

Communication for Everyone

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If you are not already convinced, we hope the importance of communication will become increasingly clear as you continue reading this chapter and finish the entire book. You may be using this book for a required course in your major, a required general studies course, or an elective course. Make the case for a basic communication course being required for all graduates at your school. To get started, people in the professional world consistently rank effective communication a vital trait for new hires and necessary for advancement.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What are some other reasons a communication course should be required?
2. Should students be required to take more than one communication course?

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Is communication simply the exchange of messages?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You have built-in expectations about the relationship between a server and a customer. You already know and take for granted that these relational differences exist in restaurants and that restaurants have "servers" who generally carry out instructions of "customers." Therefore, you expect the customer will be greeted, treated with some respect by the server, told what "the special" is, and asked to make choices. You know the customer will eventually pay for the food and that the server

is there not only to bring food, water, the check, and change but also to help resolve any difficulties understanding the menu. Flo will answer any questions about the way the food is prepared or help if you need to find the restrooms. Both the customer and the server take this for granted; it is a cultural as well as relational element of communication.

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

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

By the way . . .

Communication Apprehension

When studying communication, it is important to recognize that some people are nervous or fearful when communicating in some situations. For instance, some people are anxious when answering a question posed in the classroom. Other people are uncomfortable contributing to small group discussions. For most people, delivering a presentation is something that makes them quite anxious. *Communication apprehension* is the technical term used for the fear or anxiety you might experience when faced with communicating in situations that make you uncomfortable. On the upside, this book will help you better understand unknown and unrecognized aspects of communication. The unknown is a frequent source of discomfort. Knowing the unknown should help you manage those feelings of discomfort.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What communication situations make you the most anxious?
2. What aspects of those situations make you the most uncomfortable?

Communication Is Symbolic

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

To fully understand symbols, we can begin by discussing what they are not. Although the terms *symbol* and *sign* are sometimes used interchangeably, they do not represent the same thing. **Signs** are consequences or indicators of something specific, which human beings cannot change by their arbitrary actions or labels. For example, wet streets may be a sign that it has rained; smoke is a sign of fire. There is a direct causal connection between smoke and fire and between wet streets and rain.

Symbols, however, have no direct connection with that which they represent. They have been arbitrarily selected. For instance, the word *chair* has been arbitrarily chosen to represent the objects on which we sit, and other languages present

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

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

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As close to a moose placed on a pole as we are going to get, this particular traffic sign is actually warning motorists of a moose crossing rather than instructing them to stop. Are traffic signs really signs, or are they symbols?

the same item in different symbolic ways (e.g., *cathedra, sella, chaise, stoel,* and *zetel*). We call a chair a *chair* simply because the symbol made up of the letters *c, h, a, i,* and *r* has been chosen to represent that object. There is nothing inherent within that object that connects it to the symbol *chair*. Nothing about the symbol *chair* connects it to that object. Once again, a symbol is an arbitrary representation.

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

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

Making things even more difficult is the fact that the same symbol can mean a variety of different things even in the same culture. We talk more about meaning in the next section, but for now consider how the symbolic act of waving to someone can have multiple meanings (e.g., a greeting, a farewell gesture, or an attempt to gain attention). When David's cousin was 3 years old, he was asked to bring a yardstick to his dad who was planning on taking some measurements. His cousin promptly returned with a stick from the front yard.

The complexity of symbols is further evidence of the complexity of communication, but recognizing such complexities will enable you to begin developing a more advanced understanding and appreciation of communication.

Communication Requires Meaning

Communication requires that symbols convey **meaning**, what a symbol represents. Particular meanings, however, are not tied to only one symbol but can be conveyed in multiple ways using different symbols. For example, happiness can be conveyed by saying "I'm happy" or by smiling. During a relationship, you may have learned that frequency of talk is a meaningful indicator of a friend's emotional state. So that friend may indicate happiness just by talking more frequently than otherwise.

meaning: what a symbol represents

Social Construction of Meaning

Social construction involves the way in which symbols take on meaning in a social context or society as they are used over time. For instance, family members may use certain words or phrases that have particular shared meanings. The meanings of these words or phrases have developed through their use over time, and those unique meanings are recognized and understood by members of that family. The same thing occurs within larger cultural groups. Words and phrases used every day within the society to which you belong did not originate with previously established meanings. Rather, the taken-for-granted meanings attached to these symbols have developed through repeated and adapted use over time.

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

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

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

By the way . . .

Setting a Record for Definitions

The word (symbol) *set* has the most definitions of any English word, with some unabridged dictionaries including more than 400 meanings.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What are some other words that have many meanings? (To get you started, the second most "meaningful" word also has three letters and begins with the letter *r*.)
2. Can you come up with any words with a single definition? This question might be more difficult than you think.

Meaning and Context

A single symbol or message can also have multiple meanings when used in different contexts. For example, the *physical context,* or the actual location in which a symbol is used, will affect its meaning. If you said, "There is a fire" while in a

social construction: the way in which symbols take on meaning in a social context or society as they are used over time

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What type of communication context involves physical locations?

campground, it would mean something entirely different than if you said those exact same words while in a crowded movie theater.

The same symbols will also differ in meaning according to the *relational context*, or the relationship shared by the people interacting. Look again at the earlier example of saying, "I love you." It means something vastly different said to you by your mother, your brother, your friend, your priest, your instructor, someone you have been dating for more than a year, or someone you have just met on a blind date.

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

Verbal and Nonverbal Influence on Meaning

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

DISCIPLINARY DEBATE

Power of the Medium

There is some disagreement among scholars in the discipline concerning the impact of a medium of technology. Some scholars believe that the primary medium used by members of a society determines social structure, cultural values, and even how people think. Other scholars believe that people determine how a medium is used and ultimately determine social structure and cultural values.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you believe technology has the power to shape society?
2. Do you believe that people have more control than technology?

Meaning and the Medium

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

medium: means through which a message is conveyed

The topic is especially important in cases involving a medium. For instance, breaking up with a romantic partner can be accomplished using any of the means listed, but some

may be deemed more appropriate than others. Breaking up with someone face-to-face may be considered more appropriate than sending him or her a text message or changing your relational status on Facebook from "In a relationship" to "Single." Beyond the message of wanting to break up, additional messages, including how you view the romantic partner, the relationship itself, and yourself, are conveyed based on the medium used.

Skills You Can Use: Adapting to Cultural Expectations

Communicating in a manner consistent with cultural expectations increases a person's ability to influence others. Consider how you might adapt or adhere to cultural expectations when planning to speak with another person, a group of people, or a large audience.

Communication Is Cultural

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

Ultimately, culture influences communication, and communication creates and reinforces these cultural influences. Consider what took place during your most recent face-to-face conversation with someone. Did you greet this person with a kiss or a handshake? Was there additional touch or no touch at all? How far were you standing from one another? Did you maintain eye contact? What were you wearing? Did you take turns talking, or did you talk at the same time? How did you refer to one another? What did you talk about? Did the physical setting affect what was discussed? How was the conversation brought to a close? What happened at the end? Your answers to these questions are based partly on cultural expectations.

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

ETHICAL ISSUE

Is communicating in a manner consistent with someone's cultural expectations but inconsistent with your normal communication style unethical?

Communication Is Relational

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

By the way . . .

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Saying "Hello" in Japanese

In Japanese, there are more than 200 ways for one person to address another according to protocols of respect and status differences recognized by the participants.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. In what ways are respect and status conveyed when speaking English?
2. In what ways is disrespect conveyed when speaking English?

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

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

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

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

Consider examples from your life. Is everyone equal in your family? How are your interactions with friends different from your interactions with enemies? When watching television, does it make a difference whether you like the newscaster? Have you ever felt a connection to a character in a movie? On your last job interview, did the employer treat you like a potential valued colleague or an interchangeable worker? Are you more likely to contact some people through text messages and less likely to contact other people through text messages? We examine these questions and more throughout the remainder of the book.

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

Communication Involves Frames

Communication is very complex, but the use of frames helps people make sense of things. **Frames** are basic forms of knowledge that provide a definition of a scenario,

either because both people agree on the nature of the situation or because the cultural assumptions built into the interaction and the previous relational context of talk give them a clue (Wood & Duck, 2006). Think of the frame on a picture and how it pulls your attention into some elements (the picture) and excludes all the rest (the wall, the gallery, the furniture). In similar fashion, a **communication frame** draws a boundary around the conversation and pulls our attention toward certain things and away from others.

COMMUNICATION + YOU

Taking Things for Granted

You may not even be aware of how frames provide you with additional context and information in any communication interaction. After your next conversation with someone, take note of two or three key things that were said by this person.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What was taken for granted? What did you need to know to understand these things?
2. Do the same thing with someone with whom you share a different relationship. In what ways were the taken-for-granted assumptions the same, and in what ways were they different?

Coordinating Interactions

Frames help people understand their roles in a conversation and what is expected of them. If you are being interviewed, for instance, your understanding of the interview frame lets you know that the interviewer will be asking questions and you will be expected to answer them. Likewise, your understanding of the restaurant frame helps you understand why one person is talking about "specials" and insisting that you make decisions based on a piece of laminated cardboard that lists costs of food. Your understanding of the classroom frame will inform you of what you should do as a student and how you should interact with your instructor and with your classmates. A shared understanding of these frames is what enables people to make sense of what is taking place to coordinate their symbolic activities.

Assigning Meanings

People also use framing assumptions to make decisions about what symbols are used and how these symbols should be interpreted. Your relationship with someone and your knowledge of that person, for instance, influence what can be taken for granted or left unsaid and what must be explained. You may have a friend or relative with whom you can have a conversation, and no one else in the room would know what you are discussing. More than possibly including words or terms unfamiliar to other people, the symbols used have meaning unique to that particular relationship. Shared relational knowledge enables you and the other person to assign unique meanings to those words. Such words would not need to be explained in your conversation because both of you know that the other person understands what those words, or symbols, mean.

Perspectives

Communication frames are based partly on a person's perspectives of situations and relationships with others. These frames of perspective will greatly

ETHICAL ISSUE

Your communication with someone may appeal to certain relational obligations. For instance, friends may be expected to do certain things (give someone a ride) if they are truly friends. Is it ethical to appeal to such obligations, or is it simply part of being a friend? Are there any limits to what a person may ask someone else to do based on their relationship?

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

ETHICAL ISSUE

Communicating by using words, terms, and knowledge shared by other people can include them in a conversation. At the same time, doing so can exclude individuals who lack that shared understanding. So two people might be talking in a way that excludes a third person who is present. Would you consider this scenario an unethical use of communication?

influence the coordinating of interactions and the assigning of meaning discussed earlier. They also explain why people do not always agree on what exactly is taking place.

Consider how instructors and students do not always frame situations and their relationships in the same way. For instance, when a student asks an instructor for an extension on an assignment, a number of factors influence how both approach that interaction. A student may be considering personal demands at home, work, and other classes as valid reasons an extension should be granted. An instructor may be considering fairness to other students, maintaining accountability, and personal schedule constraints as reasons an extension should not be granted. A student may perceive the instructor as unwilling to provide an extension simply because he or she is mean or on a power trip. An instructor may perceive a student as simply being uncaring and lazy, which explains why the assignment could not be completed on time. A student may see himself or herself as a consumer paying for an education and expect instructors to satisfy his or her every whim. (Do not get us started on this one!) An instructor may perceive himself or herself in a superior role or view students more like clients—sometimes a person must tell clients things they do not want to hear. These are just a few examples of perspectives being used to frame an interaction. They certainly do not represent all perspectives, and some perspectives may be the total opposite of those presented here. Still, it gives you some idea about how a person's perspectives will influence communication frames being used during an interaction.

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

Communication Is Both Presentational and Representational

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

At first glance, the notion of communication being both presentational and representational is difficult to grasp. Consider the following way of looking at this issue: When you speak to someone, you have a number of words—your entire vocabulary—that can be used to construct your message. You will choose some words to construct the message and not choose other words. You will arrange those words chosen in certain ways and not in other ways. Your selection of words and the arrangement of

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

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

those words are meaningful acts. For instance, two different perspectives concerning people in the United States unlawfully are presented through using either the term *undocumented worker* or the term *illegal alien*. Your use of words and your construction of messages do not just represent ideas and information; these acts present your view of the world to others.

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

On other occasions, the selection of words may not be carefully planned but nevertheless presents your perspective to others. Each time someone communicates, a worldview is being shared through the selection of terms, regardless of how much thought has gone into the construction of a message. Someone saying, "I suppose I should probably go to work now" in a gloomy manner provides a glimpse into how that person views his or her job—presumably not favorably. Someone saying, "I get to go to my communication class now" in an understandably excited manner provides a glimpse into how that person views the course—presumably very favorably.

The representational and presentational nature of communication is not limited to interactions between people but includes all types of communication. Consider the earlier communication class example. Our use of the descriptor *understandably excited* provides a glimpse into the worldview of your authors. When a liberal news channel reports political events, it picks up on different aspects of the news than a conservative news channel would. The channels explain, analyze, and evaluate events differently. Each channel presents reality in the way it wants you to understand it. In this sense, you might want to think of representation as *facts* and presentation as *spin*.

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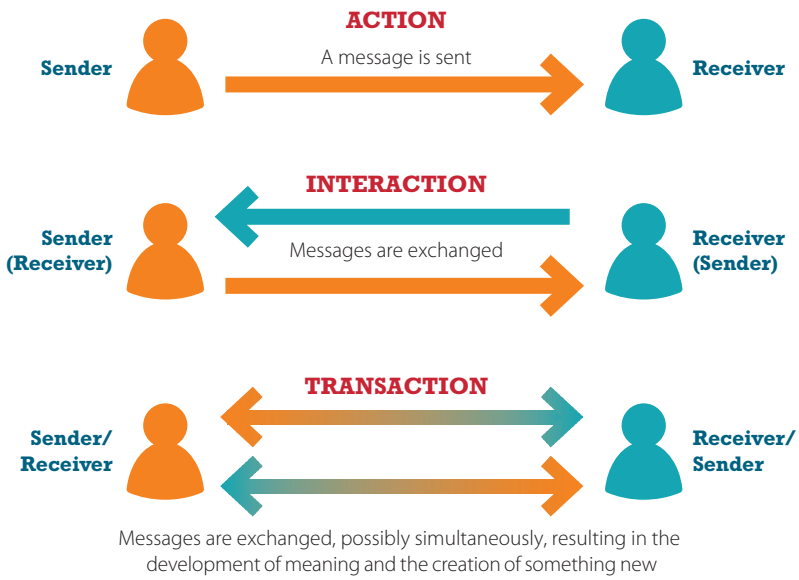
Would sending a text message be considered an act, an interaction, or a transaction?

Communication Is a Transaction

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

Figure 1.1 Communication as Action, Interaction, and Transaction



Communication as Action

Communication as action is simply the act of a sender sending a message to a receiver. Communication as *action* occurs when someone leaves a message on your voice mail, sends you an e-mail, or puts a message in a bottle in the ocean—that is, when someone transmits a message. So if Emalyn sends a text message to Corban, communication has occurred. It is pretty simple, really. However, it is not too interesting. If action was all there was to communication, we would be studying something else and not writing books about it. Communication as action could be developed slightly by questioning whether someone must *receive* a message for it to be communication. What if Corban does not check his text messages? Has communication truly occurred? That is about as far as we can take things, though. If communication were only an action, then there would really be no need to study it.

Communication as Interaction

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

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

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

Communication as Transaction

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

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

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

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

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

ANALYZING EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION

Shopping Research

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We have begun to introduce new ways to analyze situations in your everyday life. The next time you go shopping, take notes about the employee–customer relationship.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does the relationship get accomplished? For example, what is communicated/transacted by an employee's clothing, style of speech (bubbly or bored), or manner (friendly or aloof)?
2. What impressions do you form about the employee and his or her view of you?

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

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

FOCUS QUESTIONS REVISITED

1 What are symbols?

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

2 How is meaning established?

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

3 How is communication cultural?

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

4 How is communication relational?

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

5 What are communication frames?

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

6 What does it mean to view communication as both representational and presentational?

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

7 What does it mean to view communication as a transaction?

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

KEY CONCEPTS

communication as action 16
communication as interaction 16
communication as transaction 17
communication frame 13
constitutive approach to communication 17
frames 12
meaning 8
medium 10
presentation 14
representation 14
sign 7
social construction 9
symbols 7

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR FRIENDS

1. Ask your friends to define *communication*. In what ways do their definitions align with the characteristics of communication discussed in this chapter? In what ways do their definitions counter these characteristics?
2. Ask your friends to consider the difference between signs and symbols. Do they find it difficult to view some symbols as being completely arbitrary?
3. Ask your friends whether a message must be received before communication occurs. What do their answers tell you about viewing communication as an action?

MEDIA CONNECTIONS

1. In what ways do song lyrics not merely entertain but also present particular ways of living, particular attitudes, and particular styles? Find examples that present relationships differently (e.g., from Bruno Mars, Carrie Underwood, Rihanna, or Mel Tormé).
2. Watch a political discussion on a television news channel or online. How are opposing positions being presented? Is the distinction between representation and presentation obvious or hidden?
3. Watch the audio and visual coverage of a live event on television or online. Then read about the same event in a newspaper the next day. How does the medium affect your understanding of the event and the meanings you assign to the event?

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Chapter Outline

The Challenges of Writing History
The Development of a Discipline
The Emergence of Areas of Study
- Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism
- Interpersonal Communication
- Mass Communication

Coming Together (Kind of) as Communication Studies
Future of Communication and the Relational Perspective
Methods of Studying Communication
Social Scientific Approach
- Assumptions
- Methods
- Advantages
- Disadvantages

Interpretivist Approach
- Assumptions
- Methods
- Advantages
- Disadvantages

Critical Approach
- Assumptions
- Methods
- Advantages
- Disadvantages

Improving Communication Studies Through the Relational Perspective
- Communication Education and Instructional Communication
- Cultural Communication
- Family Communication
- Group Communication
- Interpersonal Communication
- Media
- Health Communication
- Organizational Communication
- Persuasion
- Political Communication
- Public Relations
- Rhetorical Criticism

Where Next?
Focus Questions Revisited
Key Concepts
Questions to Ask Your Friends
Media Connections

2 Histories and Contexts of Communication

In Chapter 1, we noted that "communication" is symbolic, presentational, and transactive (and you should understand and be comfortable with those terms before you read what comes next). We also pointed out that "communication" is more involved and interesting than our commonsense understanding of it would mislead us to believe. Although it will take us a while to steer you on the exciting journey of unpacking what seems at first to be obvious and TFG (taken for granted), some people find it helpful to think about where our ideas about "communication" came from—how the scholarly study of communication developed. You are probably also interested in where it leads—what you can do with a deeper understanding of communication, other than leading a joyous and successful life. We will cover this both indirectly in the body of the chapter and very directly at its end.

The very fact that you are reading these words means you are now engaged in the study of communication. You may be curious about interpersonal communication or about the way in which communication works or how it goes wrong. You may be inquisitive about communication in groups of friends or in the workplace. You may be interested in careers in media, advertising, the Internet, human resources, gaming, public relations, robotics, or nonprofits. The study of communication will take us into all of these issues and more.

So yippee! You came to the right place, and these questions are, very broadly speaking, the way the study of communication developed. Initially separate, parallel interest was focused on the communication between two people (interpersonal communication) and between media sources (newspapers, radio, film, TV) and large audiences. At the end of the last century, these interests both broadened and converged, taking in family communication, health communication, the Internet, and culture as areas worth understanding as part of the way to comprehend "communication." By 2016, the wide range of topics and the growth of understanding of communication made it a popular major in colleges. Many students come to it not realizing just how much there is to learn about something that we do every day without thinking. It's a bit like the way in which the study of medicine developed from obvious and familiar thinking about bodies and their structure but is now a highly sophisticated study stretching from molecular biology to the social and epidemiological environments in which molecules and bodies live and experience themselves.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. How did the modern communication discipline develop?
2. What is the social scientific approach to communication?
3. What is the interpretivist approach to communication?
4. What is the critical approach to communication?
5. What are some of the major areas of study in the communication discipline?

COMMUNICATION + YOU

What's in a Name?

We will discuss the importance of naming things and the impact of doing so later in the book. For now, take a moment to consider what impact the name of an academic department has on how it is perceived by members of the department itself, by members of other departments, by students, by administration, and by people outside academia.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is the name of the department devoted to the study of communication on your campus? How do you believe people perceive that department based on its name
2. If there are multiple departments on campus devoted to the study of communication, how do people perceive them to be both similar and different?

Of course, studying communication is not an easy proposition, regardless of how rewarding it ultimately may be. If you take a chemistry course, other people will have a general idea of what you are studying. Although there are naturally a few differences from school to school, the basic chemistry course and chemistry major look pretty much the same in colleges and universities throughout the world. The same thing goes for psychology, English, biology, and just about every area of study other than communication. Telling someone you are studying communication, however, requires explaining to her or him just what you are studying.

More than just students must explain what the study of communication involves. Instructors must do the same thing when telling people what they teach. To make matters even more challenging, instructors of communication do not always agree on what should be studied or how it should be studied!

Consider the number of names by which departments specializing in the study of communication may be called. Some of them go by the following: *communication, communications, communication studies, communication arts, speech, speech communication, rhetorical studies, mass communication, media ecology,* and *media studies*. Then, there may be combinations of those names: *communication studies and media* or *speech and communication*. There can also be additional areas added to the name, such as *journalism, film, radio and television, theater,* and so on.

The first lesson to learn, then, is that some of the disputes about the definition of *communication* come from the fact that different people see it as an umbrella over different topics in the first place (speech? theater? film? TV? interpersonal? media?). Your authors' unifying approach is to connect communication to the one thing that lies beneath all speech, talk, or sharing of symbols—namely, relationships.

The Challenges of Writing History

This introduction may give you some idea of the reasons why communication is such a diverse area of study and how we propose to help it all make sense for you. Our relational approach will end up tying things together, both in this chapter and in the rest of the book. However, we cannot (yet) give a relational approach to the history of communication. Just like strangers meeting for the first time and ending up as friends, we need to focus first on the diversity and different histories (or strangers' experiences) that can ultimately be tied together by understanding the deeper underlying commonalities. This way we can see and form the relationship between initially different perspectives (personalities).

It is naïve to assume that there is only one view about the history of communication. You may have noticed that the title of this chapter therefore says *histories* of communication rather than *history* of communication. By now you will be ahead of us and will get the idea that writing a single history of the discipline is too simplistic. There are many different perspectives and many different beliefs about the origins of something so varied—at least, when you look only on the surface.

For instance, a person focusing on media would start at one point (perhaps the printing press), and a person studying interpersonal communication would start at another point (perhaps conversation studies at the beginning of the last century). The underlying common feature is that both media and interpersonal communication depend on some relationship with "the audience." But we'll come to that a little later.

We also made the point in the first chapter that communication is both representational and presentational. Communication can describe *facts* and can offer a *spin* on those facts. So describing history is also presentational, with a particular spin put on things.

Each historian writes from a particular perspective and with particular major interests. One area of study in communication studies is devoted to **historiography**, which studies the persuasive effect of writing history in particular ways and the reasons why particular reports and analyses are offered by specific authors. The history of the United States of America written by a British historian in 1815 would be quite differently positioned ("We won! We got rid of a troublesome colony!") from such a history written by an American historian in 1815 ("We won! We got rid of a troublesome oppressor!").

Communication research and theory develop and change as scholars labor in their studies. One of the key goals of research is precisely to make developments and corrections to our understanding. Such changes lead to a reevaluation of what has happened and had been assumed to be true before, for example, correcting the omission (from older history) of the contributions of women or people of color (Delia, 1987). Occasionally, those studies that have previously been regarded as reliably *classic* are then seen in a new light that makes them less important. In their turn, the replacement *classics* also fade as new approaches and critiques become available. That's progress!

By the way . . .

Continued Disagreements

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Disagreement is nothing new when it comes to the study of communication. It started with the ancient Greek schools of rhetoric and philosophy, which were often in conflict with one another. Rhetoricians wanted to persuade people by any means that was effective. Philosophers wanted to find only good, honest, truthful arguments. Dishonest means of persuasion were sometimes acceptable to rhetoricians but not to philosophers.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Would you rather be represented by a dishonest but effective attorney or an honest one (even if you are guilty)?
2. What are some other areas of life in which this debate is still relevant?

The Development of a Discipline

When it comes to the origins of the communication discipline, writers are likely to begin with Aristotle in the 4th century BCE. However, we can trace the roots of communication study to well before Aristotle. The first documented essay on communication was written around 3000 BCE, addressed to Kagemni, son of the Pharaoh Huni. The earliest existing book on effective communication is *Precepts,* written in Egypt by Ptahhotep around the year 2675 BCE (McCroskey, 1968).

historiography: the study of the persuasive effect of writing history in particular ways and the reasons why particular reports and analyses are offered by specific authors

ETHICAL ISSUE

A link to the National Communication Association (NCA) "Ethical Statements" can be found at www.natcom.org/publicstatements. Do you agree with the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication? Would you add, remove, or alter any of the statements?

In modern times, the communication discipline was formalized for academic study out of studies of rhetoric, elocution, and speech. The first formally organized professional association devoted to its study, the Eastern Communication Association, was founded in 1910 (see Chesebro, 2010).

The first national association devoted to the study of communication, currently known as the National Communication Association, was established in 1914 as the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking. Always a contentious discipline, this association was founded by a rogue group of 17 members of the National Council of Teachers of English who did not believe enough attention was being given to the study of oral address (Cohen, 1994).

Since these first two academic associations, a number of associations have been developed throughout the world. These associations are established based on region of the country (e.g., Central States Communication Association, Eastern Communication Association, Southern States Communication Association, and Western States Communication Association), state location (e.g., Iowa Communication Association), and interest (e.g., Kenneth Burke Society and International Association for Relationship Research). There is also an International Communication Association and a World Communication Association.

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When looking at images such as this one, changes in focus will lead to changes in what is observed and how it is seen. How might this be similar to the development of histories?

Such organizations provided the basis for offering degrees in "communication studies" (etc.) and the basis for students getting credit for their work in that discipline in schools and colleges across the world. In short, these organizations provide the discipline with a *presence* in the larger academic community. The most important functions these associations provide are the publication of journals and the holding of conferences. Journals are where academic research is published. Table 2.1 provides a list of journals currently published by the National Communication Association and its four regional affiliates. Conferences, which are usually held annually, allow academics to come together to develop and share ideas related to the discipline and its instruction as well as to share and discuss research. That's how lecture notes get updated and you are told about current ideas rather than those wrinkly ones that are past their sell-by dates.

The Emergence of Areas of Study

As a formal academic discipline, then, communication got its start as a discipline devoted to the study of public speaking, debate, and performance. A person did not study *communication*; rather, a person studied *public speaking* or *speech*. Public speaking's legacy is still evident in the discipline, especially within basic communication courses. However, without ignoring such influences and origins, modern books such as this one now stress the importance of understanding everyday behaviors, rather than special events such as major speeches by single individuals. Abe Lincoln was not the only person alive on November 19, 1863, but we know more detail about the Gettysburg Address than we do about the lives of ordinary

folk of the time, though this emphasis is rapidly changing. The change from an emphasis on striking individuals or unusual events to a deeper understanding of everyday behavior is taking place in many different disciplines as they mature. Our focus on everyday life is one of the growing trends.

In what follows, we will discuss the three major areas that emerged during communication's first century as a formal discipline: (1) rhetoric and rhetorical criticism, (2) interpersonal communication, and (3) mass communication.

Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism

The study of rhetoric originated with the development and delivery of public address. Wealthy citizens sent their sons (yes!) to learn from such wise people as Aristotle and Socrates. With the invention of writing, the study of rhetoric expanded into that realm as well. In modern times, the development of formal sites of higher learning and academic departments as we now know them led to the placement of rhetoricians in departments of English.

Scholars more interested in the study of public address than the written word eventually distanced themselves from the English discipline. These scholars argued what now seems obvious in hindsight—literature and public address and performance are not the same things, even if the basis of good writing and good speaking does rest on the same principles of research, organization of thought, and careful reflection on the type of audience for whom the output is intended.

Rhetorical criticism and theory developed student learning beyond the actual creation and delivery of a speech. It also enabled students to describe, interpret, and evaluate the spoken word.

The study of rhetoric underwent massive changes throughout the past century, as new techniques and perspectives were developed (Olson, 2010). However, rhetoric's value and position within universities were not readily challenged during its early emergence. This is likely because of its historical lineage and is in sharp contrast to what was experienced by the next areas of communication that we discuss.

Interpersonal Communication

During the same time that communication associations were being founded, there was an emerging interest in interactions between people. For instance, scholars studied such interpersonal concepts as characteristics of dyads and interaction rituals at the beginning of the previous century. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, articles about conversation were appearing in a journal of what would eventually be known as the National Communication Association.

The study of interpersonal interaction continued to grow and develop in subsequent decades, with scholars from multiple disciplines engaged in its study (Borisoff,

Table 2.1 Communication Journals

National Communication Association

Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies
Communication Education
Communication Monographs
Communication Teacher
Critical Studies in Media Communication
First Amendment Studies
Journal of Applied Communication Research
Journal of International and Intercultural Communication
Quarterly Journal of Speech
Review of Communication
Text and Performance Quarterly

Central States Communication Association

Communication Studies

Eastern Communication Association

Communication Quarterly
Communication Research Reports
Qualitative Research Reports in Communication

Southern States Communication Association

Southern Communication Journal

Western States Communication Association

Communication Reports
Western Journal of Communication

By the way . . .

The Position of Public Speaking

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Public speaking is a common and unsurprising feature of many basic communication courses. The communication discipline is still expected by other disciplines in the academic community to teach speech. The ability to give coherent presentations is a necessary skill for students, and our discipline teaches it better than any other discipline. Yay! Go Comm Studies!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you think public speaking should be included in basic communication courses?
2. Would not including public speaking have a positive or negative impact on the discipline of communication?

Hoel, & McMahan, 2010). Scholars from newly developed speech departments and linguistics, psychology, sociology, and other disciplines were studying interpersonal communication but did not have their own academic home. Without an academic home shared by people with similar interests, it is difficult to collaborate on research, and there is limited influence in universities.

Departments devoted to the study of speech and rhetoric were also experiencing problems by the end of World War II. A *social scientific* revolution had occurred during that period. Increasing numbers of scholars were engaged in scholarship involving experiments and statistical analysis. However, scholars in departments studying speech and rhetoric generally were engaged in other types of scholarship. As a result, departments needed to adjust to remain relevant (Cohen, 1994).

So there was a group of scholars needing an academic home and a discipline needing to adapt to a new academic environment. Whether it was the number of speech researchers already studying conversation and interaction (McMahan, 2004), the oral tradition of speech departments (Wiemann, Hawkins, & Pingree, 1988), or a combination of factors, scholars studying interpersonal communication eventually found themselves in speech departments.

It should be noted, however, that this arrangement was far from peaceful. People in these departments were being forced to study new subject matter and other people in these same departments needed to justify their research. Neither of these groups was really happy about the situation, and this tension continued for a number of years.

Mass Communication

A third major area of the communication discipline that played a key role in its development was mass communication. We have taken issue with the *mass* part of the term *mass communication* in other writings (Duck & McMahan, 2012). However, we will use the term here because that was what the area was generally labeled during the early development of the discipline.

As with interpersonal communication, scholars from multiple departments within universities engaged in the study of mass media such as newspapers, books, and eventually radio in the early decades of the previous century. As with interpersonal communication, an official academic home for scholars interested in this research did not exist.

Mass communication scholars found an initial home in journalism departments. Once again, as was the case with interpersonal communication, this arrangement was mutually beneficial to those studying mass communication and journalism. They were able to establish an academic home, while their research provided legitimacy for journalism education. Until that time, many universities did not consider journalism worthy of graduate study (Carey, 1979; Wilcox, 1959). However, mass communication scholars did not get along with those already in those departments, and they didn't really fit.

Coming Together (Kind of) as Communication Studies

The way we just ended the sections on rhetoric, interpersonal communication, and mass communication makes it sound as if nothing has happened for the past few decades, except the collection of a lot of dissatisfied curmudgeons. That is far from the truth. In fact, a great deal has happened since the initial founding of the discipline. For the sake of time and space, we will provide you with a condensed version.

As mentioned already, public speaking is still an area of study in many basic communication courses. However, it has a limited presence in the discipline in advanced courses.

Rhetoric continues to be a notable area in the discipline. However, its study is no longer limited to public address. Instead, rhetoric is more likely to study all influences on communication—especially political communication—including media content, technology, and even architecture.

The study of interpersonal communication continued to grow in popularity at the undergraduate and graduate levels. A departure from earlier research in this area, the study of interpersonal communication tends to focus on close personal relationships rather than simply two people talking with one another. The study of social and personal relationships is now a dominant presence in the discipline of communication.

Mass communication and journalism are still connected to some extent in some universities. However, the study of media is most likely to occur in another department and is generally considered an area of communication studies. A primary reason for this separation is the introduction of other media than newspapers. Radio was already in homes by the 1940s, and television was introduced in the 1950s. Also giving rise to its move away from journalism, scholars in departments of communication became increasingly interested in the study of media. They welcomed scholars and students with comparable interests. As with interpersonal communication, the study

DISCIPLINARY DEBATE

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Skills or Theory?

The primary question for early mass communication scholars and those already in journalism departments was "What should be their focus?" Those already teaching journalism believed the focus should be more on skills and training. Mass communication scholars believed the focus should be on research and theory. Scholars taking an applied communication approach would probably be somewhere in the middle—seeking ways to use theory and research to improve communication in various settings.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Choosing from the two extremes, do you believe the discipline of communication should focus more on skills or on theory?
2. Are the two extremes enough to justify separate disciplines?

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It is important that students of communication be aware of some of the challenges still facing the discipline and work together to address and overcome these challenges. What are these challenges?

of media is now a major area in the discipline of communication. Indeed it has significantly expanded with the rise of the social media. The fact that such social media are used for relational purposes often means that scholars studying social media may be in either interpersonal communication or media divisions of a communication department.

Future of Communication and the Relational Perspective

History writing frequently tends to assume that everything stops at the present. It also tends to assume that the present is the way that things *should* be, the result of a "logical unfolding" of developments that are described within the analysis or report.

If we assume that the development of the discipline has not yet finished, we must assume it is continuing. If the discipline of communication studies has not evolved to a final state of perfection as a result of previous historical and intellectual forces, then where is it to go next?

If you do not know our answer to this question by the time you finish reading this book, then our time spent writing this textbook has not been worthwhile. Here's a clue: We are unable to see any area of communication studies to which a *relational perspective* could not be taken. The chapters represented in this book are on traditional topics studied by undergraduates in communication majors and basic courses nationwide. We have been able to give all of these topics a relational twist and to show that underneath all these traditional topics is a presumption about the nature of personal relationships and their influence in everyday life.

The future of the discipline can benefit from applying our relational perspective even more broadly. We hope that our overview in this chapter and the other chapters in this book convince enough people to take our particular view of the topic and to push forward for those social changes that are necessary to make the future foreseen in this book become a reality.

As communication enters its second century as a formal academic discipline, things are looking pretty good. In many colleges and universities, departments related to communication studies are listed among those with the largest numbers of majors. Further, the knowledge and skills taught in the discipline are among the most sought after by employers. It is a respected and powerful area of study that can only grow from adopting the relational prospective.

Methods of Studying Communication

Now you know! The very nature of communication is expansive, and numerous challenges have been experienced in the development of the discipline. In part, these differences are intertwined with scholarly concerns about methods. If you want to study pairs of people interacting, then you can bring them into the lab, interview them in their homes, or analyze transcripts of their chatter. If you want to study the effects of television or social media, then you need to develop a different style of approach. You may run mass surveys, collect anonymous e-mail data, or establish viewing and usage trends in a large population.

These differences in methods are significant because they point researchers at different sorts of information and different questions. A personal interview gives