Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate - Introductory Communication Studies

Royce Cano, Anya Iyengar, and Nicole Stibbard

De Anza College

Social Sciences



Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate: An Introductory Communication Studies Textbook

Royce Cano, Anya Iyengar, and Nicole Stibbard

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3. **Specialist review.** Once the manuscript was complete, an accessibility expert conducted an accessibility check.
4. **Remediation.** The author and the project manager who conducted the earlier progress checks worked together to remediate the issues identified by the accessibility expert.
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This process combines ongoing checks during writing with a final specialist review, so issues are caught early and confirmed fixed before publication.

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Contact us: De Anza ZTC team

This statement was last updated August 2026

This resource was project-managed by **Shagun Kaur**, overseeing scope, budget, and schedule; stakeholder coordination via monthly meetings; training and platform support (LibreTexts, troubleshooting, technical support); QA/accessibility check scheduling; and licensing and copyright governance.

A Note on Known Limitations

No accessibility check is perfect. We've made a genuine, sustained effort to catch and fix issues throughout the writing and review process described above, but some barriers may remain, especially in complex or interactive content. We'd rather be upfront about that than claim a standard of perfection we can't guarantee.

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As authors of this text, we made it a priority to use GenAI mindfully and ethically. ChatGPT was primarily used to alphabetically organize lists and create, edit, and/or polish captions, key takeaways, section summaries, chapter overviews, and chapter reviews. It was also used occasionally and sparingly to reorganize, edit, and/or grammar-check disorderly and dense paragraphs. In one instance, ChatGPT was used to create section 10.3.

We also recognized that AI systems can reflect biases, inaccuracies, omissions, or outdated information. For this reason, we did not accept any content without human review and independent verification. We evaluated all factual claims, educational recommendations, examples, and references against current evidence, professional standards, and the authors' subject matter expertise. The human authors ultimately remain responsible for the content, not the technology used during development. We encourage any future authors of OER materials who may use GenAI to do so thoughtfully and attentively, with the knowledge that it may, can, and will make mistakes.

Our use of AI mirrors how many professionals increasingly use emerging technologies in education and the workplace: as tools that can enhance efficiency, creativity, and productivity while still requiring critical thinking, ethical judgment, and expert oversight. By incorporating AI transparently and responsibly, we sought not only to improve the development process but also to model thoughtful technology use for students navigating an increasingly digital and AI-assisted world.

Finally, we believe that innovation must be balanced with a commitment to equity and accessibility. Throughout development, we reviewed all content to ensure it met accessibility standards and supported diverse learners. AI-assisted drafting was only one component of a much larger process that included faculty collaboration, scholarly review, accessibility evaluation, and continuous revision. The result is a resource that reflects both the opportunities offered by emerging technologies and the enduring importance of human expertise in teaching and learning.

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- The Office's Part 3 report on AI model training highlights the importance of fair use analysis and restricts reliance on generative AI when it could replicate copyrighted works—our use was limited to non-protected, openly licensed materials.
- This cautious approach is consistent with guidance. that encourages transformative use, transparency, and limiting output that could inadvertently mirror protected content.

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About the Book

Acknowledgments

Alongside team collaboration, many scholars and resources made this textbook possible. As a team, we extend our sincerest thanks to all who supported the creation of this devoted endeavor.

Open Education Resources Authors

We extend our genuine gratitude to the scholars whose dedicated work helped shape this textbook. Their research and writing set a high standard and provided us with a strong foundation. Without their efforts, this textbook would not be possible. We would like to thank every author of the following Open Education Resources (OER) textbooks:

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A Note from the Authors of Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate

This project, which took over a year to complete, became a real-world example of effective group communication. Our team collaborated across states, using modern technology to stay connected through regular virtual meetings and ongoing conversations. Through this rigorous process, we developed not only a textbook but a deeper appreciation for each other's perspectives, working styles, and voices. We hope that you find this textbook as rewarding to read as it was for us to create.

A Note to Instructors

Thank you for choosing this OER textbook. We recognize that you have many textbook options, and we're grateful you've selected ours. Our goal was to create a textbook that is academically challenging and genuinely engaging. We wanted to create something that we ourselves would enjoy using in the classroom. To support student learning, we've included exercises, discussion questions, and quizzes designed to reinforce key concepts and encourage active participation.

A Note to Students

Welcome to *Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate*. We're excited to have you join us on this journey through the many

dimensions of communication. Together, we'll explore communication as a whole, with a focus on interpersonal communication, group communication, and public speaking. Each area offers skills that will serve you beyond the classroom and for a lifetime. We hope this textbook sparks curiosity, builds confidence, and perhaps even inspires a future career path. As an added benefit, this resource is available to you at no cost because of access to Learning Matters.

Communication Studies is one of the most interdisciplinary and adaptable disciplines in academia. Depending on the school, you might find it housed in Language Arts, Social Sciences, or within Journalism and Mass Media. Communication Studies is a multi-faceted discipline that is dynamic, constantly evolving, and socially consequential. As our global population continues to grow, we look to communication to connect us meaningfully both in practice and in theory.

About Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate

Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate invites you to explore communication as a living, breathing discipline. From its historical roots to its modern-day applications across diverse communities, this text highlights how communication shapes our world. While we acknowledge major historical milestones and cultural trends, our focus remains on timeless principles rather than fleeting movements, ensuring that the material stays relevant. Rich visuals and accessible design support a wide range of learning styles, making this textbook engaging and inclusive for all students, which was our primary priority.

Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate is designed for introductory communication courses, but we invite all branches of the discipline to explore this textbook. The text is organized into four core sections: An Overview of Communication Studies, Interpersonal Communication, Group Communication, and Public Speaking.

An Overview of Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate

- Chapters 1–2 establish communication as both a concept and a practice, beginning with its definition, historical development, and key forms (intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass) while emphasizing its importance in academic, professional, and personal success. The text then shifts to perception and its role in shaping communication through self-concept, confidence, and relationships, using tools like the Johari Window to show how self-disclosure and feedback enhance listening and empathy.
- Chapters 3–7 expand into interpersonal dynamics, showing how culture, generation, socio-economic factors, and relationships influence communication, including verbal, nonverbal, listening, and digital interaction, alongside the development of friendships, romantic relationships, and the role of social media, while also examining how power operates through authority, expertise, persuasion, and influence.
- Chapters 8–9 move into group communication, exploring how culture, language, and worldview shape group outcomes, the roles individuals take (task, relational, self-focused), and practical decision-making and leadership tools like reflective thinking, consensus, voting, and the Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum.
- Chapters 10–14 focus on public speaking, covering speech structure, research methods (primary vs. secondary, qualitative vs. quantitative, surveys, interviews, and focus groups), delivery and anxiety management, and ultimately developing informative and persuasive speaking skills through audience analysis and the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos.

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Author Biographies

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 Anya Iyengar, M.A.	**Anya Iyengar** is a Communication Studies professor at De Anza College and San Jose State University. She has her B.A. in Marketing from the University of Florida and her M.A in Communication Studies from San Jose State University. Her academic focuses include compassionate communication in the healthcare industry and emotional intelligence in interpersonal relationships. She enjoys cooking, interior design, health and wellness, fitness, and travel.

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1: INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Overview

In order to under key concepts pertinent to communication studies, one must begin with a working definition that provides a consistent foundation for the discipline. The field's history stretches from oral traditions to digital media, illustrating how human symbolic interaction and communication studies have evolved together. Five major forms of communication (intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication) are commonly identified. These areas are distinguished by their context, participants, and purpose, demonstrating the broad scope of communication.

Communication is inherently interdisciplinary and relevant across many fields, including digital media, environmental messaging, workplace interactions, and interpersonal relationships. Strong communication skills are highly valued by employers, and communication coursework builds transferable abilities like public speaking, ethical communication, and intercultural understanding. Graduates often pursue careers in business, media, education, and government, emphasizing communication's importance for academic and professional success in today's interconnected world.

Foundational models of communication (transmission, interaction, and transactional) provide frameworks for understanding how meaning is created and shared. Communication can be understood as a dynamic, learned, and ethically grounded process that fulfills physical, relational, identity, and instrumental needs while being shaped by cultural norms and contexts. Developing communication competence involves knowledge, behavior, and adaptability, progressing through various stages of awareness ranging from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence.

Communication apprehension, particularly public speaking anxiety, is a common challenge, but effective strategies can help manage it. Additionally, mindful, ethical communication enhances effectiveness and strengthens interactions across diverse settings.

Chapter Goals

- Define communication, its history, and forms.
- Review benefits and career options for those studying communication.
- Identify, define, and compare and contrast the three models of communication.
- Review how communication is integrated into daily life, how communication meets our needs, and how communication is guided by culture and context.
- Define communication competence and identify how to enhance our communication competence.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Channels
- Communication
- Communication Apprehension
- Communication Competence
- Conscious Competence
- Conscious Incompetence
- Cultural Context
- Decoding
- Encoding
- Feedback

- Group Communication
- Identity Needs
- Instrumental Needs
- Interaction Model
- Interpersonal Communication
- Intrapersonal Communication
- Mass Communication
- Noise
- Norms
- Participants
- Phatic Communion
- Physical Context
- Physical Needs
- Psychological Context
- Public Communication
- Relational Context
- Relational Needs
- Rhetoric
- Social Context
- Transaction Model
- Transmission Model
- Unconscious Competence
- Unconscious Incompetence

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Glossary

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1.1: Understanding Communication Studies

Defining Communication

Before exploring the history of communication, it's essential to define what we mean by "communication." We recognize that there are countless definitions of communication, but we feel it's important to provide you with our definition so that you understand how we approach each chapter in this book. We are not arguing that this definition of communication is the only one you should consider viable, but you will understand the content of this text better if you understand how we have come to define communication.

For this text, we define **communication** as the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs that are influenced by various contexts. This definition builds on over a century of refined communication theories. Since the study of communication began over 100 years ago, more than 126 definitions have been proposed (Dance & Larson, 1976). To understand how communication has evolved, let's dive into the field's history.

When we mention that we teach communication, people often ask: Do you teach radio and television? Public speaking? Journalism? Mass communication? But the most frequent question is simply: "What is communication?" Despite people claiming to understand it, few can clearly explain what communication scholars study. Even faculty from other departments often ask the same question.

As professors, we often hear discussions about communication, yet many struggle to define it or explain what communication departments do. Even students majoring in communication sometimes find it challenging to clarify their field of study. This book aims to give you a solid foundation of what communication is, what scholars and students study, and how you can apply it in your own life, regardless of your major.

As communication professors and students, we extensively examine the various forms and outcomes of human communication. On its website, the National Communication Association (NCA) states that communication studies “focuses on how people use messages to generate meanings within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media. The discipline promotes the effective and ethical practice of human communication...Communication is a diverse discipline which includes inquiry by social scientists, humanists, and critical and cultural studies scholars.” Now, you’ll be equipped to answer what you're studying in your communication classes!

History of Communication

While animal and interspecies communication are fascinating, this book focuses on human communication. Humans are unique in their ability to use symbols to discuss concepts beyond our immediate reality, such as abstract ideas like "education,” to discuss a concept that encapsulates many aspects of teaching and learning. This ability allows us to reflect on the past, imagine the future, and create systems like art, philosophy, and academic theories. While animals like gorillas can use symbols, their level of abstraction is not as advanced as humans’. However, our sophisticated communication systems have developed over time.

Some scholars speculate that early human communication involved onomatopoeic words and hand gestures. Onomatopoeic words are those that phonetically imitate or resemble the sound they describe: words like "boing," "drip," or "whack.” These primitive forms provided an evolutionary advantage, helping humans cooperate, share information, and warn of danger. Over time, this led to a “Talking Culture” during the “Talking Era” (180,000 BCE to 3500 BCE), where spoken language and gestures were the main communication methods.

Around 3500 BCE, the “Manuscript Era” began with the shift from oral to written culture. As humans settled into agricultural life, they needed systems to track resources and transactions. Early records used objects like pebbles, but eventually, symbols carved into clay replaced them. This period also saw the rise of class systems and organized religions, both of which required written records. Despite this, literacy remained largely confined to the elite until the 1800s.

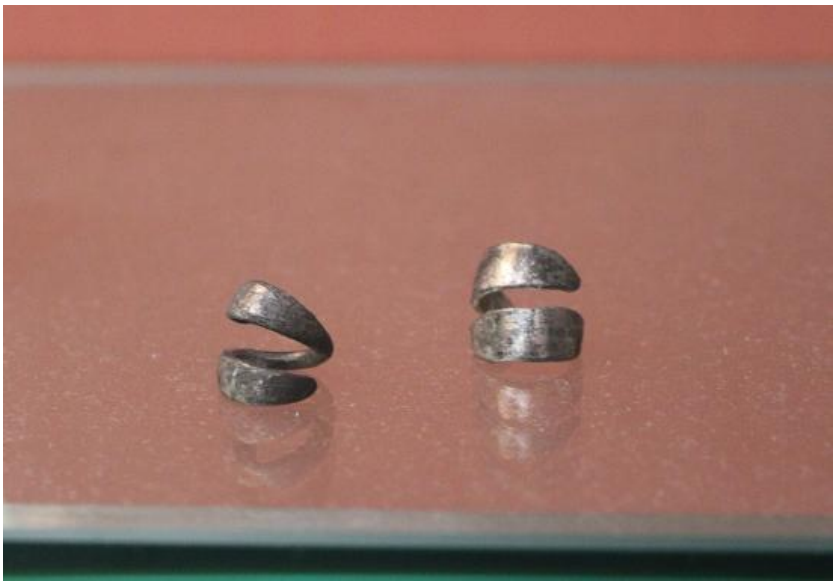


Figure 1.1.1: Silver rings used as currency during the Akkadian period (ca. 2334–2154 BCE), excavated at Tell Taya, Iraq. These standardized forms of weighed silver reflect early Mesopotamian economic systems before coined money. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Zunkir via Wikimedia Commons)

The “Print Era” (1450–1850) saw the invention of the printing press and the mass production of written texts, followed by the “Audiovisual Era” (1850–1990) with inventions like the radio and television.



Figure 1.1.2: 17th-century printing press, based on Gutenberg’s 15th-century design, instrumental in the spread of printed texts during the European Renaissance. This technology revolutionized communication, literacy, and the dissemination of knowledge. (CC BY 4.0; Amfeli via Wikimedia Commons)

Figure 1.1.2 is a 17th-century printing press modeled after Johannes Gutenberg’s original 15th-century design. The press is constructed primarily of dark wood and iron, featuring a large screw mechanism at the top used to apply pressure to a flat press bed below. A wooden handle extends from the side for manual operation. This early printing technology was instrumental in the mass production of books and documents, playing a crucial role in the spread of knowledge, literacy, and communication during the European Renaissance. It represents a transformative moment in history when ideas could be widely shared through printed texts.

The current “Internet Era,” which began in 1990, marks the rapid spread of digital communication via the Internet, digital media, and personal media.



Figure 1.1.3: The Digital Equipment Corporation's KA-10 computers at Bolt, Beranek and Newman (BBN), circa 1970, used for timesharing and ARPANET development. These systems represent early innovations in networked computing and laid the groundwork for the modern Internet. (Public Domain; BBN via Wikimedia Commons)

Figure 1.1.3 is a black-and-white photo from around 1970 showing a row of KA-10 computers at Bolt, Beranek and Newman (BBN), a key site for ARPANET development. The image captures large, cabinet-sized computer units with numerous control panels, indicator lights, and wiring, typical of early mainframe systems. The room appears utilitarian, with cables running across the floor and workers visible in the background, suggesting active development and testing. These KA-10 systems were used for timesharing and played a foundational role in the creation of ARPANET, the precursor to the modern Internet. This setup represents an important milestone in the evolution of networked computing and digital communication.

The evolution of communication technologies also shaped the study of communication. The earliest writings on communication appeared during the Manuscript Era, which saw the production of the earliest writings about communication. In fact, the oldest essay and book ever found were written about communication (McCroskey, 1984). Although this essay and book predate Aristotle, he is a logical person to start with when tracing the development of communication scholarship. His writings on communication, although not the oldest, are the most complete and systematic.

Ancient Greek philosophers and scholars such as Aristotle theorized about the art of **rhetoric**, which refers to speaking well and persuasively. While rhetoric is often viewed negatively today, it originally referred to persuasive communication with an emphasis on ethics. An instructor at the University of Central Florida, Madeleine Mulford, stated that "The word 'rhetoric' is hard to pin down. Often, it's negatively associated with political speech and dubious agendas" (UCFTODAY, 2023). Additionally, Dr. Leack, instructor at the University of Southern California, when asking students to define rhetoric, said that their "responses range from 'persuasion' to 'manipulation,' but they tend to share a negative connotation," (USC Dornsife, 2023). He continued by stating:

> Little wonder: In America today, the word is often used to dismiss a political opponent. Whereas a Democrat may find a favorite candidate’s speech inspiring, a Republican might call it “mere rhetoric,” implying a lack of substance or even honesty.

While rhetoric is often associated with politics in a particularly negative manner, rhetoric has infinite potential and power. The potential, influence, and power are commanded by the speaker, and it is up to that speaker to communicate, persuade, and advocate ethically. Ethical rhetoric remains a key concept in communication studies. This book will further explore power, ethics, rhetoric, and persuasion in the following chapters: "Culture and Power," "Research," Speech Organization," and "Persuasive Speaking."

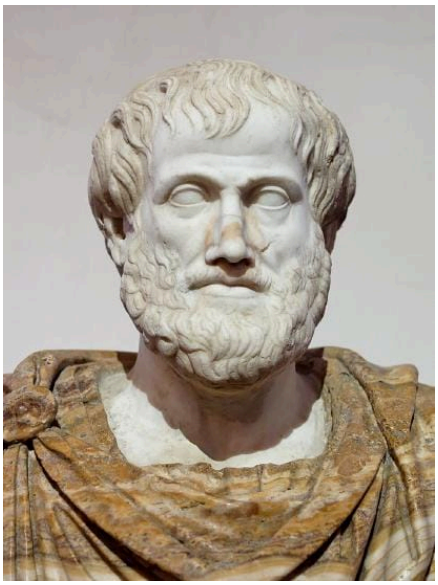


Figure 1.1.4: Roman marble bust of Aristotle, a 1st-century AD copy of a Greek original, housed at the Museo Nazionale Romano. This portrait reflects Roman admiration for Greek philosophy and the transmission of classical thought. (Public Domain; Museo Nazionale Romano via Wikimedia Commons)

Rhetoric, which focused on public speaking, policy debates, and legal matters, connected communication and citizenship early on. Later, Roman orators like Cicero expanded rhetorical theories, including the five canons of rhetoric: invention (using evidence to think in new ways), arrangement (organizing speech), style (language use), delivery (vocal and physical presentation), and memory (retaining information). The academic developments during the Age of Enlightenment in the 1700s laid the foundation for modern communication studies, as there was an explosion of philosophical and scientific writings on many aspects of human existence. This focus on academic development continued into the 1900s and the establishment of distinct communication studies departments.

Communication studies as a distinct academic discipline is just over 100 years old. Before the early 1900s, communication was taught in English or rhetoric departments, where a divide existed between professors of written and spoken rhetoric. In 1914, a group of speech teachers founded the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, eventually leading to the National Communication Association. The field broadened over time to include social and psychological aspects of communication, influencing how communication is studied today. There was also a distinction of focus and interest among professors of speech. While some focused on the quality of ideas, arguments, and organization, others focused on coaching the performance and delivery aspects of public speaking (Keith, 2008). Instruction in the latter stressed the importance of “oratory” or “elocution,” and this interest in reading and speaking aloud is sustained today in theater and performance studies, as well as in oral interpretation classes, which are still taught in many communication departments.

The formalization of speech departments led to an expanded view of the role of communication. Even though Aristotle and other ancient rhetoricians and philosophers had theorized the connection between rhetoric and citizenship, the role of the communicator became the focus instead of solely focusing on the message. James A. Winans, one of the first modern speech teachers and an advocate for teaching communication in higher education, said there were “two motives for learning to speak. Increasing one’s chance to succeed and increasing one’s power to serve” (Keith, 2008). Later, as social psychology began to expand in academic institutions, speech communication scholars saw additional connections that would further expand definitions of communication to include social and psychological contexts. Today, you can find elements of all these various aspects of communication being studied in communication departments. Now let’s turn to a discussion of the five major forms of communication.

Forms of Communication

Communication takes different forms based on participants, channels, and contexts. The five main forms are intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication. We will explore the similarities and differences among these forms, including their definitions, intentionality, goals, and contexts.

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication involves communicating with oneself through internal vocalization or reflective thinking. It's triggered by both internal and external stimuli, like hunger or witnessing an event. Unlike other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication occurs only inside our minds and doesn't require an external audience.

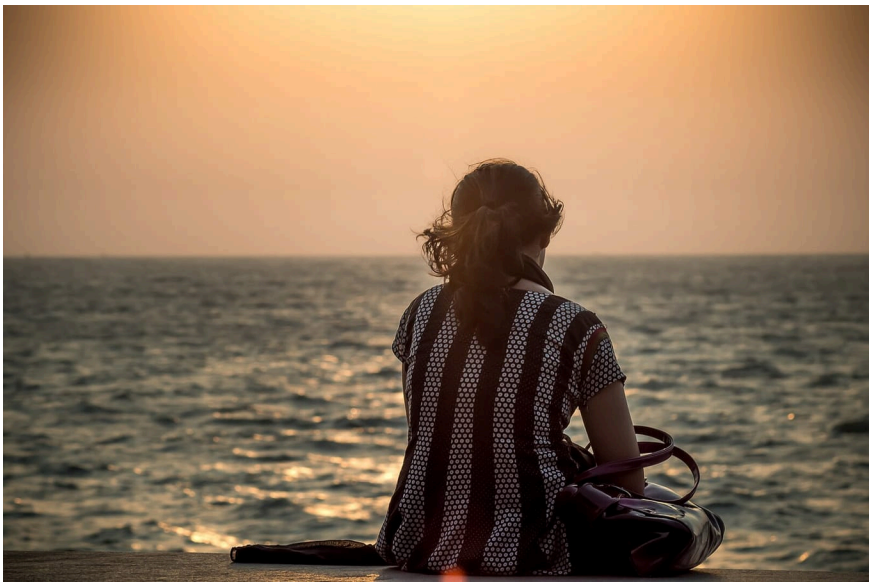


Figure 1.1.5: A contemporary photograph portraying a solitary figure at dusk. The image symbolizes the intrapersonal dimension of communication, where self-reflection influences how individuals perceive themselves and relate to others. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Jinesh Panchal via Wikimedia Commons)

This type of communication serves several social functions. For example, self-talk can help manage stress or assist shy individuals in navigating social situations. It also plays a key role in building and maintaining our self-concept, as we internalize how others perceive us. The shy person in the earlier example probably internalized shyness as a part of their self-concept because other people associated their communication behaviors with shyness and may have even labeled them "shy" before they had a firm grasp on what that meant. We will further discuss self-concept in the chapter titled "Communication and Perception." Intrapersonal communication can help us process emotions, plan actions, or rehearse what we intend to say. Competent intrapersonal communication fosters social interaction and supports well-being.

Sometimes, we intrapersonally communicate for the fun of it. We all have had the experience of laughing aloud because we thought of something funny. We also communicate intrapersonally to pass time. In both cases, intrapersonal communication is usually unplanned and doesn't include a clearly defined goal (Dance & Larson, 1976). However, it can also be intentional, such as when self-reflection helps us become more aware of our behaviors. For example, internal feedback might encourage or criticize our actions.

Despite its importance, intrapersonal communication is the least studied form. It typically isn't the focus of academic courses and is often separated from other communication types. The key distinction is that intrapersonal communication is not intended for external consumption, unlike the other forms, where the communicator anticipates their message being received.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication involves interaction between people whose lives mutually influence each other. It builds, maintains, and ends relationships, and is the form of communication we engage in most. Interpersonal communication is studied in subfields like intercultural communication, organizational communication, health communication, and computer-mediated communication, as relationships exist in all these contexts.



Figure 1.1.6: Bisi Silva and Alessandro Petti engaged in dialogue at a public event. This image highlights interpersonal communication in action, emphasizing the role of face-to-face interaction in knowledge exchange, collaboration, and relationship-building. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung via Wikimedia Commons)

While it can be planned or unplanned, interpersonal communication is usually more structured and influenced by social expectations than intrapersonal communication. It is also goal-oriented, fulfilling both instrumental and relational needs. For example, instrumental needs may range from a simple greeting to expressing a desire for a committed relationship. Relational needs focus on the uniqueness of a specific relationship. Since interpersonal communication directly affects personal relationships, it is where miscommunication and conflict often arise (Dance & Larson, 1976). Whether in romantic partnerships, workplaces, or families, misunderstandings are common. To be a competent communicator, skills in conflict management and listening are essential, which we will further explore in the chapter titled "Interpersonal Communication."

Group Communication

Group communication involves three or more people interacting to achieve a shared goal. You've likely experienced group work in school, and while it can be frustrating, it provides valuable experience for professional settings. With organizations shifting to team-based models, group work is an integral part of life, making the study of group communication essential in many contexts.



Figure 1.1.7: Individuals participating in cooperative group work, illustrating key aspects of group communication such as collaboration, shared decision-making, and the co-construction of meaning in task-oriented settings. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Dirk Tussing via Wikimedia Commons)

Group communication is more intentional and formal than interpersonal communication. Unlike voluntary interpersonal relationships, group members are often assigned specific roles. It is typically task-focused, with the group working together for a common goal. For example, a corporate group might be tasked to figure out a plan for moving a business from one office to another, whereas goal-oriented interpersonal communication usually relates to one person. For example, you might ask a friend to help you move out of your apartment this weekend.

While group work can be complicated by the number of communicators, many challenges arise from interpersonal conflicts or misunderstandings. Since group members interact both interpersonally and as part of the group, elements of interpersonal communication inevitably emerge. The chapter titled "Small Group Communication" will guide you in becoming a more effective group communicator by exploring group theories, processes, and roles that impact group dynamics.

Public Communication

Public communication is a sender-focused form of communication where one person conveys information to an audience. Although many fear public speaking, it plays a crucial role in academic, professional, and civic life. Compared to interpersonal and group communication, public communication is the most intentional, formal, and goal-oriented.



Figure 1.1.8: German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle delivers a speech at the 46th Munich Security Conference in 2010. The image exemplifies public communication, where a speaker addresses a live audience to inform, persuade, or influence opinions on matters of shared civic or political concern. (CC BY 3.0 DE; Kai Mörk via Wikimedia Commons)

In Western societies, public communication tends to be more sender-focused, which often causes anxiety in speakers. To manage this, it helps to recognize the similarities between public speaking and more familiar forms of communication, such as interpersonal communication. While public speakers don't form individual relationships with the audience, they still receive verbal and nonverbal feedback in face-to-face settings. Later in this chapter, you'll find strategies for managing speaking anxiety. Additional chapters titled "Speech Organization," "Research," "Delivery and Style," "Informative Speaking," and "Persuasive Speaking" will guide you through selecting a topic, researching, organizing, delivering, and evaluating your speeches in order to improve.

Mass Communication

Public communication becomes **mass communication** when transmitted to many people through print or electronic media. While print media like newspapers and magazines remain important, they've been overshadowed by electronic media like television, websites, blogs, social media, radio, and podcasts. The technology required to send these messages distinguishes mass communication from other forms. Although mass communication is intentional, the goals of the message creator, like a writer, television host, or interviewee, vary. For example, the United States president's State of the Union address is a formal, goal-oriented message, while an offhand remark during an interview is not, yet both instances are examples of mass communication.



Figure 1.1.9: A view inside the NBC News control room, where monitors, technical staff, and production teams coordinate live television broadcasts. The image illustrates the behind-the-scenes infrastructure of mass communication, highlighting how media professionals collaboratively manage the real-time delivery of information to broad, distributed audiences. (CC BY 2.0; Anthony Quintano via Wikimedia Commons)

Mass communication differs from interpersonal, group, and public communication in the lack of personal connection. While creators often try to simulate a personal connection, there's no immediate feedback loop. Although you can send letters or emails in response, there's no real-time interaction like in face-to-face communication. However, with social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X, feedback has become more immediate, with users directly engaging with media creators through posts, comments, or hashtags. Many media organizations now encourage and share feedback live.

The ability to mass-produce and distribute messages means a single voice can reach and influence many people, making mass communication uniquely powerful. This power raises ethical concerns, as the consequences of unethical mass communication can be far-reaching. Scholars of mass communication often examine how media shapes culture and who gets represented. We'll explore these topics further in the chapters titled "Culture and Power" and "Persuasive Speaking."

Key Takeaways

- Communication is the process of creating meaning through verbal and nonverbal symbols within various contexts, and it is studied as a broad academic discipline encompassing social, psychological, and cultural perspectives.
- Human communication evolved from oral and written traditions through print, audiovisual, and now digital eras, each shaping how messages are created, shared, and studied.
- Rhetoric, originating with Aristotle and Cicero, laid the foundation for communication scholarship, emphasizing ethical and persuasive speaking.
- Communication occurs in five primary forms: communicating with oneself (intrapersonal), between individuals (interpersonal), within teams (group), from a single speaker to an audience (public), and through media to large populations (mass), each serving different functions and settings.
- Effective communication involves understanding these forms, their goals, and challenges, such as managing interpersonal conflict, public speaking anxiety, and ethical concerns in mass media.

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1.2: Applying Communication Studies

The Value in Studying Communication

Studying communication offers endless possibilities. For instance, you might explore YouTube's history (Soukup, 2014), deception in texting (Wise & Rodriguez, 2013), or college students' media habits (Panek, 2014). You could also look at how family members communicate disappointment (Miller et al., 2013), how parental communication patterns influence romantic relationships (Young & Schrodt, 2016), or how parents construct narratives about health decisions such as HPV vaccination (Garcia et al., 2024). In terms of gender, researchers have examined communication differences in spatial proximity and social behavior (Yang et al., 2016) and the ways motherhood is represented in lesbian-headed households (Koenig et al., 2012). Media and technology remain central to communication studies, with work examining how adolescents and parents interact in digital spaces (Rudi, Walkner, & Dworkin, 2015). Environmental communication is another dynamic area, addressing emotional responses to climate change (Wong-Parodi & Feygina, 2021), media framing of climate solutions (Günay et al., 2021), public messaging strategies (Ballew et al., 2024; O'Callaghan et al., 2025), and the role of culture in climate engagement (Munshi et al., 2020). Additionally, organizational research highlights shifts in workplace communication, such as the modularity of networks during remote work transitions (Zuzul et al., 2021). These examples showcase the diversity of research topics in the field, illustrating its dynamic and interdisciplinary nature.

As a student, you might wonder, "Why does this matter to me?" One key reason is that communication skills are essential for success in personal, social, and professional situations. Employers in 2025 consistently rank communication as one of the most in-demand skills across industries, alongside leadership, problem-solving, and adaptability (HR Dive, 2025). Communication majors are especially well-prepared for today's dynamic and hybrid work environments, where clear messaging, collaboration, and emotional intelligence are essential. Whether you're a communication major or not, understanding communication gives you a better chance at success. It also opens doors to a range of career opportunities.

Example 1.2.1: Getting a Promotion

Scenario: You're newly hired as a junior associate at a nonprofit organization. Much of the team works remotely. During your first few weeks, you apply your understanding of organizational and intercultural communication to navigate virtual meetings, clarify expectations via email, and build rapport with colleagues from different backgrounds and time zones.

Impact: Your supervisor commends you for your ability to collaborate effectively and communicate clearly, even in a digital-first workplace. You're soon asked to co-lead a cross-departmental initiative, giving you early leadership experience and visibility within the organization.

Job Opportunities

Communication studies is a broad and vibrant field with diverse subfields and concentrations. However, since communication studies is a broad field, many students strategically select a concentration or minor to enhance their marketability. Specialization can be a strong advantage, but it's also important to recognize the general, transferable skills you develop as a communication major. This book, for instance, is designed to help you build competence in interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, group communication, and public speaking, among other areas. Your campus's career services office can also help you learn how to market yourself as a communication major and articulate how your coursework translates into valuable skills for resumes, cover letters, and interviews.



Figure 1.2.1: A young man participates in a job interview, illustrating interpersonal communication through active listening, body language, and formal dialogue. Interviews serve as structured settings where verbal and nonverbal cues significantly influence impression formation and decision-making. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Amtec Photos via Wikimedia Commons)

Communication majors typically pursue careers in business, public relations/advertising, media, nonprofit work, government/law, and education. Each of these areas includes multiple career paths, potential employers, and recommended strategies for success.

Common Career Paths for Communication Majors

- **Business**: Sales, customer service, management, real estate, human resources, training and development
- **Public Relations**: Marketing, advertising, public opinion research, event coordination
- **Media**: Editing, copywriting, publishing, producing, directing, media sales, broadcasting
- **Nonprofit**: Administration, grant writing, fundraising, public relations, volunteer coordination
- **Government**: City or town management, lobbying, conflict resolution, community affairs
- **Education**: Speech instruction, debate coaching, student support services, academic administration, or graduate study in communication

Strong communication skills can significantly enhance interview performance, even in technically competitive fields. The following scenario illustrates how effectively applying communication principles can distinguish a candidate during the hiring process.

Example 1.2.2: Securing the Job

Scenario: You're a senior majoring in business with a minor in communication. You're interviewing for a marketing coordinator role. During the interview, you draw on your communication coursework to answer behavioral questions clearly and confidently. You use structured storytelling to explain a time you led a successful group project and resolve a conflict. You maintain positive nonverbal communication, eye contact, posture, and tone, and actively listen, asking thoughtful follow-up questions.

Impact: The hiring manager later says your communication skills stood out among other candidates, especially your clarity, professionalism, and confidence. You receive a job offer, beating out applicants with stronger technical backgrounds but weaker interpersonal presence.

Key Takeaways

- Studying communication offers broad, interdisciplinary insights into how people create and interpret messages across contexts, making it relevant to many fields and practical for personal and professional success.

- Communication research covers diverse topics, from digital media and relationships to environmental messaging and workplace dynamics, all showing the field's evolving nature.
- Strong communication skills are highly valued by employers and enhance transferable competencies like public speaking, teamwork, and intercultural understanding.
- Communication majors have diverse career opportunities in business, media, public relations, government, education, and nonprofits, with specialization boosting job marketability.
- In today's hybrid and fast-changing work environments, communication skills, especially in collaboration and emotional intelligence, are essential for adaptability and leadership.

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1.3: The Communication Process

The Flow of Communication

Communication is a complex process, making it hard to pinpoint where or when a communication encounter begins or ends. Models of communication simplify this process by visually representing different elements of a communication exchange. Although no model can fully capture the richness of real-life communication, they are useful for understanding key concepts and steps, allowing us to approach future interactions more thoughtfully. The three models we'll discuss are the transmission, interaction, and transaction models.

Despite their differences, these models share common components. Both the transmission and interaction models include participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. **Participants** are the senders and/or receivers in a communication encounter. The message is the content being communicated, whether verbal or nonverbal. For instance, when saying "Hello!" to a friend, you are sending a message of greeting that will be received by them.

Encoding and decoding are the internal cognitive processes that allow participants to send and interpret messages. **Encoding** is the process of turning thoughts into communication, while **decoding** is the reverse process: turning communication into thoughts. For example, if you think "I'm hungry" and send a message to your roommate asking, "Do you want to get pizza tonight?", you've encoded that thought. Your roommate then decodes it to understand your intention. Communication isn't limited to words; it also relies on **channels**, or sensory routes through which messages travel. These channels can be visual (sight) or auditory (sound), but most communication happens through these two senses. If your roommate is wearing headphones, you may need to wave your hand to get his attention before asking about dinner.

Transmission Model of Communication

The **transmission model of communication** presents communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver (Ellis & McClintock, 1990). This model emphasizes the sender and the message within the communication encounter. Although the receiver is technically included, their role is largely passive, serving more as a target or endpoint rather than as part of an ongoing, interactive process. The model presumes that the receiver either successfully receives and understands the message or does not.

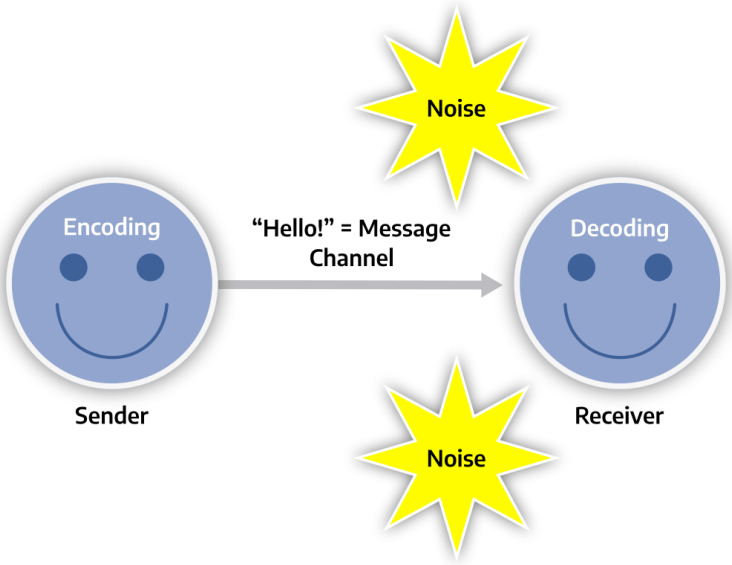


Figure 1.3.1: The Transmission Model of Communication: The diagram depicts a one-directional flow of communication, in which a sender encodes and transmits a message to a receiver who decodes it, with the process subject to possible interference from noise. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Andy Schmitz via Wikimedia Commons)

The transmission model, (Figure 1.3.1), is an extension of the linear model proposed by Aristotle centuries ago, which consisted of a speaker, message, and listener. Scholars who designed this model were influenced by the emergence of new communication technologies such as telegraphy and radio, which shaped the structure of this model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). For example, when listening to a radio broadcast, the sender (radio announcer) encodes a verbal message, which is transmitted through a radio tower (the channel) via electromagnetic waves. The message is then received by the listener (the receiver) through the radio's antenna and speakers for decoding. The radio announcer, however, has no way of confirming whether the listener has fully received and understood the message, but the success of the technology and channel, free from interference, suggests the message is likely conveyed.

In this model, the responsibility lies with the sender to ensure that the message is transmitted successfully. The focus is on clarity and effectiveness of communication, while also acknowledging the existence of barriers that could hinder effective communication. These barriers, also known as **noise**, refer to anything that interferes with the message being sent, received, or understood in a communication encounter. Even if a speaker sends a clear message, external noise can disrupt the communication process. For instance, environmental noise refers to physical disruptions such as background chatter in a crowded restaurant, which may make it difficult for the sender's message to be accurately received. In contrast, semantic noise occurs within the encoding and decoding processes when the participants fail to understand a symbol or message. A technical example of this could be the issue of FM antennas not being able to decode AM radio signals. Similarly, semantic noise can arise in communication between people speaking the same language if words have multiple meanings or if unfamiliar terms are used.

Although the transmission model may seem overly simplistic or underdeveloped by today's standards, its creation allowed scholars to view communication in new ways, which laid the foundation for the more complex models and theories of communication that we will explore. While this model may not be robust enough to capture the dynamic nature of face-to-face interactions, it remains applicable in certain instances where communication is one-way and linear, such as computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC has become integral to modern communication, introducing both new possibilities and challenges. For example, text messaging is a prime instance where the transmission model fits. The sender in a text message is unsure whether the meaning was conveyed or if the message was successfully received. Noise, especially semantic noise, can also disrupt text communication. For instance, using an abbreviation the receiver doesn't understand, or a phone's auto-correct function turning words into something unintended, can distort the message.

Interaction Model of Communication

The **interaction model of communication** presents a more dynamic understanding of communication by illustrating it as a process where participants alternate roles as sender and receiver, generating meaning through the exchange of messages and feedback within both physical and psychological contexts (Schramm, 1997). Unlike the linear transmission model, which focuses on a one-way message flow, the interaction model incorporates a feedback loop, making communication a two-way process. **Feedback** consists of messages sent in response to other messages. For example, a professor may respond to a comment you made during a class discussion, or you may point to the sofa when your roommate asks where the remote control is. This back-and-forth exchange allows for a more complex understanding of participants' roles. Instead of a static sender, message, and receiver, the interaction model portrays two sender-receivers who continuously exchange messages, with each participant alternately taking on the roles of sender and receiver. While this process might seem deliberate, the transition between these roles often occurs rapidly and without conscious thought.

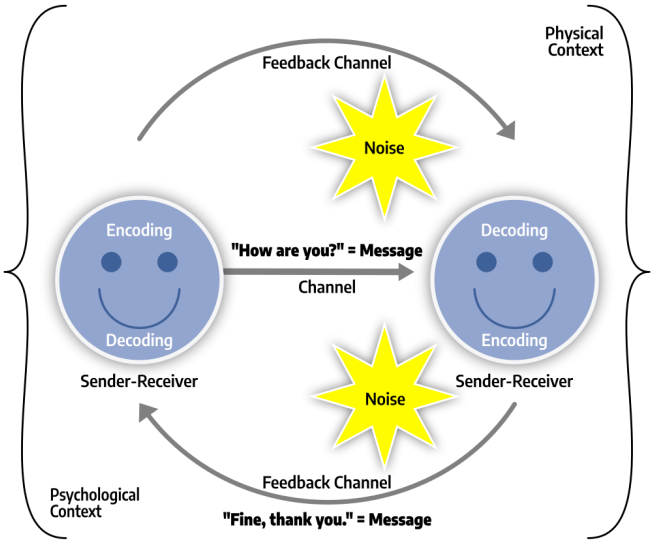


Figure 1.3.2: The Interaction Model of Communication: The diagram illustrates that communication is two-directional, includes feedback, and occurs within overlapping contexts that can be affected by noise. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-SA 4.0; University of Minnesota via Wikimedia Commons)

The interaction model, (Figure 1.3.2), shifts focus from the message itself to the broader process of interaction. While the transmission model emphasized how a message is transmitted and whether it is received, the interaction model acknowledges that multiple messages are often exchanged at once, and many may not even be consciously received. This model also accounts for unintended messages being sent, meaning that communication in this context is not judged based on the effectiveness of transmitting a single message but on the flow of the interaction itself.

In addition to the messages exchanged, the interaction model accounts for both physical and psychological context, factors that significantly influence communication. **Physical context** refers to the environmental conditions that affect a communication encounter, such as the space, temperature, lighting, and layout of the setting. For example, job interviews can occur in diverse settings that affect communication differently, whether it's a cozy office sofa, a formal conference table, or even a crowded coffee shop. These environmental factors can influence both the comfort level and the communicative exchange as a whole, highlighting the importance of considering the physical context in any communication encounter.

On the other hand, **psychological context** includes the mental and emotional states of participants during the communication encounter. Stress, anxiety, and emotional states can all serve as significant psychological influences on how we communicate. For instance, what if you had to deliver a public presentation shortly after receiving distressing personal news? It's likely that the emotional impact of that news will interfere with your thoughts, making communication difficult. Even positive emotional states, such as being "love struck" early in a romantic relationship, can affect communication, leading individuals to overlook negative behaviors or incompatible traits that they might otherwise assess more critically.

By including both feedback and context, the interaction model provides a richer and more comprehensive illustration of the communication process. However, the transaction model goes further by viewing communication as a powerful, co-constructive force that shapes not only individual encounters but also the realities of participants within the broader social and cultural landscape.

Transaction Model of Communication

As the study of communication evolved, models expanded to encompass a more comprehensive understanding of the communication process. Many scholars now view communication as more than a simple exchange of messages for conversation and meaning. Unlike computers, humans do not send messages in a perfectly linear fashion, nor do we neatly alternate between the roles of sender and receiver during interactions. Communication is a constant, ongoing process, and we cannot simply decide to "stop communicating" as it is embedded in our social practices, interactions, and cultural exchanges. The transaction model of communication distinguishes itself from both the transmission and interaction models by offering a more holistic understanding of communication, including the conceptualization of communication, the roles of participants, and the importance of context (Barnlund, 1970).

To recap, each model conceptualizes communication in different ways. The transmission model views communication as a one-way process through which messages are transmitted from sender to receiver. In this model, communication is defined as the mere act of sending and receiving messages. The interaction model redefines communication as an exchange in which one message is followed by feedback, and this loop continues, establishing a two-way conversation. Here, communication is understood as the production of interactions, shaped by physical and psychological contexts. By contrast, the **transaction model** presents communication as integral to the creation and transformation of our social realities. In this view, communication doesn't merely convey messages about our realities; communication actively constructs and reshapes them. The transaction model describes communication as a dynamic process in which communicators jointly create social realities within broader social, relational, and cultural contexts. Rather than solely exchanging messages, we communicate to build relationships, form alliances, shape our self-concepts, and engage in dialogues that help create communities. In this model, communication doesn't just reflect our existing realities; it plays a crucial role in the construction of those realities.

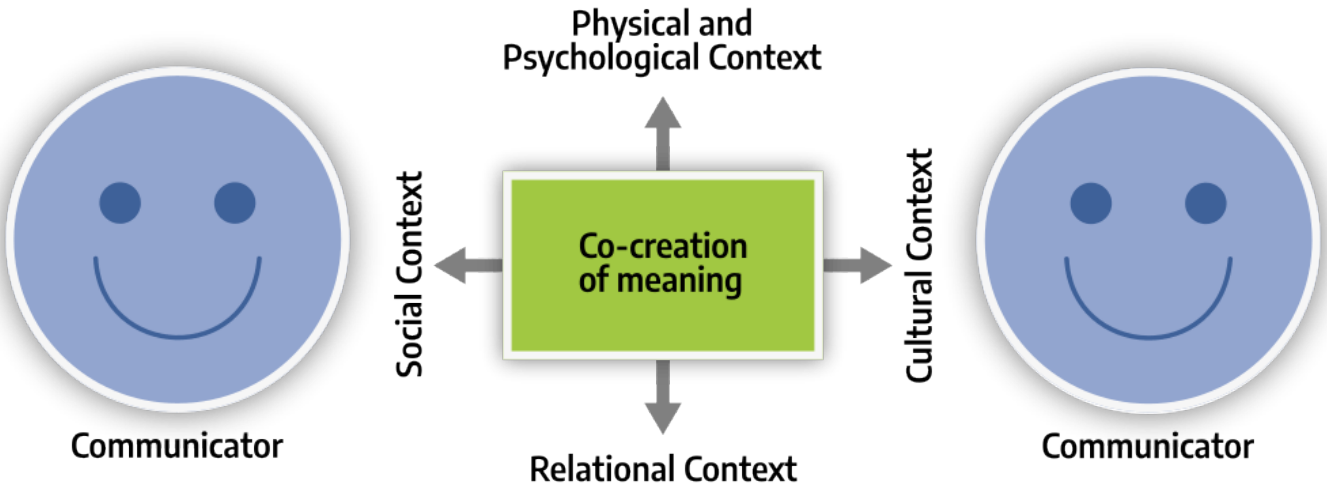


Figure 1.3.3: The Transaction Model of Communication: The diagram depicts communication as a simultaneous, collaborative process in which meaning is co-created by communicators, shaped by social, cultural, physical, psychological, and relational contexts. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Andy Schmitz via Wikimedia Commons)

The roles of sender and receiver in the transaction model, (Figure 1.3.3), also differ from the other models. Rather than being passive roles that alternately switch between individuals, participants in a communication encounter are referred to as communicators in the transaction model. Unlike the interaction model, which depicts participants as alternating between sending and receiving messages, the transaction model recognizes that communicators are simultaneously both senders and receivers. For instance, on a first date, you might verbally express your interests and background, while your date simultaneously decodes your verbal message and responds nonverbally. These interactions occur concurrently, allowing each communicator to adapt their messages in real-time based on feedback. This is a critical shift in understanding, as it highlights how communication is more fluid and adaptive than models that treat it as a sequential or turn-taking process.

Additionally, the transaction model offers a more complex understanding of context. While the interaction model mainly considers the physical and psychological context as factors that enhance or impede message transmission, the transaction model broadens the scope of context to include social, relational, and cultural dimensions that influence communication before, during, and after a particular interaction. This expansion acknowledges that the larger socio-cultural environment significantly impacts how communication occurs.

Social context refers to the explicit and implicit rules or norms that guide our communication behavior. As individuals, we are socialized into various communities, and we learn the rules and norms of such communities, which help structure our communicative practices. Common rules include not lying, not interrupting others, or greeting people when they greet you. Parents, teachers, and other figures of authority often teach these rules directly.

Norms, on the other hand, are social conventions picked up through observation, practice, and experience. For example, a new employee may not know the dress code norm at a company holiday party, leading them to either overdress or underdress. Even if there is no formal rule about attire for said company, they quickly learn the unspoken norm through observation and social feedback, often adjusting accordingly in future interactions. While breaking norms doesn't always lead to formal punishment, the social discomfort that follows such violations often teaches individuals the power of norms. In some instances, norms can even override formal rules; for example, it may be acceptable to lie to protect someone's feelings or interrupt a close friend in an

animated conversation. Since norms and rules vary across cultures and communities, understanding these social contexts is vital for effective communication.

Relational context encompasses the history and type of relationship between participants. We communicate differently with strangers than with individuals we have known for a long time. Early interactions tend to be more formal and scripted, governed by explicit or implicit norms. However, as relationships develop, communication often becomes more relaxed, and social norms may be bent or ignored. For instance, when inviting new neighbors over for the first time, you might meticulously clean the house and provide undivided attention. However, after establishing a deeper friendship with those neighbors, such behaviors may become less necessary.

Finally, **cultural context** refers to the various identities, such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and ability, that shape individuals' communication practices. Understanding these identities is crucial, as cultural contexts can profoundly influence how communication is conducted and interpreted. People with marginalized identities are often more attuned to how their cultural backgrounds shape communication, while individuals from dominant groups may be less aware of how cultural identities affect interactions. In intercultural communication, differences in cultural context can create uncertainty, sometimes deterring people from engaging across cultural lines or leading them to view such interactions negatively. However, avoiding intercultural communication only perpetuates discomfort and limits growth. Embracing cultural diversity can enrich communication and foster deeper understanding. To communicate effectively in diverse cultural contexts, it's essential to maintain an open mind and refrain from making assumptions based on visible cultural cues. Competent communicators understand that cultural contexts can be both visible and invisible, and adapting to these shifting contexts requires both skill and ongoing intrapersonal and interpersonal reflection.

Key Takeaways

- Communication models simplify complex processes by illustrating how meaning is created and shared; the transmission, interaction, and transaction models each offer distinct perspectives.
- The transmission model views communication as a one-way, linear process focused on sending messages, vulnerable to noise and lacking feedback.
- The interaction model adds feedback and context, showing communication as a two-way exchange influenced by physical and psychological environments.
- The transaction model presents communication as a dynamic, simultaneous process where participants co-create meaning within broader social, relational, and cultural contexts.
- Understanding these models helps us appreciate communication's evolving nature and the importance of context, roles, and feedback in shaping shared realities.

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1.4: Communication Principles

Communication is Integrated Into All Aspects of Life

This book aims to show communication's value beyond theory or passing tests, as it is deeply woven into our daily lives. To explore this, our lives are divided into four spheres: academic, professional, personal, and civic. These areas overlap as skills learned in the classroom often apply professionally and civically. This approach, called integrative learning, encourages us to connect what you learn here to other classes, your career goals, and civic duties.

Academic

As students in a communication class, you likely see its academic relevance, starting with earning a good grade. But beyond that, this text and your course will challenge you to link communication skills across your courses. Building this foundation now will enhance your competence and benefit your overall academic success. Research shows communication courses improve verbal, nonverbal, and interpersonal skills, boost confidence, and correlate with higher GPAs and lower dropout rates.

Example 1.4.1: Successful Group Work

Scenario: You're in a biology class and working on a group project about climate change's effects on ecosystems. One group member dominates the conversation, while others stay quiet. Using skills from your communication course, like active listening and assertive speaking, you facilitate a more balanced discussion, encourage input from quieter members, and help the group agree on a fair division of tasks.
Impact: The project runs more smoothly, your team works more collaboratively, and your professor commends your group dynamics. You also get a better grade.

Professional

Strong communication skills are among the top qualities employers seek in college graduates. Similarly, strong interpersonal skills consistently rank among employers' top demands. Poor communication, such as weak listening or unclear feedback, can hinder workplace success. Introductory communication courses teach essentials like listening, writing, speaking, researching, organizing, and decision-making. Despite this, some students hesitate to take communication classes, perhaps believing they already communicate well. However, formal training can provide a competitive edge in the job market.

Example 1.4.2: Impressing the Boss and Gaining Experience

Scenario: You're interning at a marketing firm and are asked to pitch a campaign idea in a team meeting. You apply concepts from your communication class, like structuring your presentation clearly, using visuals effectively, and maintaining confident body language. You also respond thoughtfully to feedback.
Impact: Your pitch impresses your supervisor, who invites you to join more strategic meetings. You gain valuable experience, build confidence, and improve your chances of future employment.

Personal

Most students recognize communication's role in relationships but may underestimate its extent. When we reach the interpersonal chapters, you'll see how theory and vocabulary give you tools to understand, improve, and reflect on your interactions. Having the language to identify communication patterns empowers you to consciously adjust behaviors, avoid misunderstandings, and learn from mistakes.

Example 1.4.3: Improving Relationships

Scenario: You and your roommate have been arguing about household responsibilities. Instead of escalating the conflict, you use "I" statements and active listening skills learned in class to express your feelings without blame. For example, "I feel overwhelmed when I have to clean everything alone."
Impact: Your roommate responds more openly, and together you agree on a cleaning schedule. Your relationship improves, and you feel more in control of your emotional responses.

Civic

Civic engagement involves working to improve community life or participating in political and social processes, and is sometimes less tangible to students. It ranges from local involvement to contacting legislators and is vital for a healthy democracy (Ehrlich, 2000). Aristotle, who laid the foundation for communication theories, emphasized communication as essential to civic participation and virtuous citizenship. Although younger adults tend to be less politically active, millennials are often engaged in volunteerism and community service. Colleges offer resources to support civic engagement, and you're encouraged to explore how to connect this course's lessons to your role as an active citizen. See more at: De Anza Civic Engagement.

Example 1.4.4: Becoming an Active Community Member

Scenario: You attend a city council meeting about plans to reduce public transportation funding in your area. Drawing from your communication training, you prepare a short speech advocating for student needs and speak confidently during the public comment period.
Impact: Your remarks are well received, and a council member reaches out to discuss further. You join a local transit advocacy group and start using your communication skills to organize petitions and inform other students.

Communication Meets our Needs

Communication is more than just exchanging information. While messages help meet physical and practical needs, communication also shapes our identities and relationships in profound ways.

Physical Needs

Physical needs are essential for our functioning and survival, and communication plays a critical role in meeting them. While often associated with cognitive processes, communication also affects physical well-being. At a basic level, it allows individuals to express unmet needs, such as when a baby cries from hunger or someone asks for shelter after eviction. Communication is also tied to psychological and physical health; humans are inherently social, and isolation can cause severe harm (Williams & Zadro, 2001). Effective interpersonal communication reduces stress, depression, and anxiety (Hargie, 2011), and can be therapeutic. For example, individuals who did not talk with friends after a traumatic loss experienced more physical health issues than those who did (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). Thus, while satisfying physical needs is vital, meeting instrumental, relational, and identity needs is also crucial for social functioning and well-being.

Instrumental Needs

Instrumental needs refer to communication that helps us accomplish everyday tasks and achieve short- and long-term goals. Much of daily communication is focused on fulfilling these needs, such as influencing others, acquiring information, or seeking support (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). Communication to meet instrumental needs is often strategic. Research on compliance-gaining communication, aimed at getting others to act in specific ways, explores this process (Gass & Seiter, 1999). Unlike coercion, which involves force or manipulation, compliance-gaining relies on ethical communication free from pressure. It also differs from persuasion, which typically involves influencing groups through public speaking, while compliance-gaining focuses on interpersonal interactions. Researchers have identified common tactics used in everyday compliance-gaining communication (Gass & Seiter, 1999).

Common Tactics Used for Compliance Gaining

- **Offering Rewards:** Seeks compliance positively, by promising returns, rewards, or generally positive outcomes.
- **Threatening Punishment:** Seeks compliance negatively, by threatening negative consequences such as loss of privileges, grounding, or legal action.
- **Using Expertise:** Seeks compliance by implying that one person "knows better" than the other based on experience, age, education, or intelligence.
- **Liking:** Seeks compliance by acting friendly and helpful to get the other person into a good mood before asking them to do something.
- **Debt:** Seeks compliance by calling in past favors and indicating that one person "owes" the other.
- **Altruism:** Seeks compliance by claiming that one person only wants "what is best" for the other and he or she is looking out for the other person's "best interests."
- **Esteem:** Seeks compliance by claiming that other people will think more highly of the person if he or she complies or think less of the person if he or she does not comply.

Relational Needs

Relational needs involve the communication necessary to initiate, maintain, and sometimes end interpersonal relationships. While instrumental communication supports daily functioning, relational communication fulfills our innate need for social connection. Communication enables relationship development through nonverbal cues, conversation, and self-disclosure. Once relationships are formed, they require ongoing communication for maintenance, such as expressing affection or showing support. Communication also plays a key role in relational decline and dissolution, whether through avoidance, criticism, or explicit endings. These interactions, whether digital or face-to-face, form the foundation of relational bonds. However, not all relational communication is positive; some patterns, like manipulation or passive aggression, can be harmful.

Identity Needs

Identity needs involve the desire to present ourselves to others in specific, often favorable, ways. Our sense of identity is shaped not only by internal self-perception but also through communication with others. As identity evolves, communication remains the central means by which it is expressed and negotiated. Like public figures who may craft various images or versions of themselves, individuals present different "faces" depending on context. Erving Goffman (1959) described self-presentation as a performance, with people enacting different roles in different situations. Competent communicators manage these roles effectively, adapting their behavior to fit social expectations. For example, individuals may shift from supportive to authoritative roles depending on context, or modify behavior as professional roles change. These performances influence how others perceive us and help fulfill our identity needs.

Communication is a Process

Communication is a process that involves an interchange of verbal and/or nonverbal messages within a continuous and dynamic sequence of events (Hargie, 2011). Since it's continuous and dynamic, it's often hard to pinpoint exactly when communication starts or stops. Studying communication means taking snapshots of this flow, like isolating feedback or eye contact, but this interrupts the natural process. Still, these snapshots are useful for scholarly interrogation of the communication process, and they can also help us evaluate our own communication practices, troubleshoot a problematic encounter we had, or slow things down to account for various contexts before we engage in communication (Dance & Larson, 1976).

We know from the transaction model that communication involves multiple channels, sending and receiving messages simultaneously. Yet, we only focus on a limited amount of information at once. This fluid nature leads to some key principles: communication messages differ in how consciously they're crafted, communication cannot be undone, and every communication event is unique and unrepeatable.

Some scholars define communication strictly as messages intended for others. This narrow definition only includes messages that are tailored or at least targeted to a particular person or group and excludes any communication that is involuntary (Dance & Larson, 1976). But consider this: if you frown and sigh on a bus without meaning to, and someone notices, is that communication? Yes, because meaning was created, even if unintentionally. So, communication includes both intended and unintended messages.

Communication varies by how much conscious thought it involves. Reactionary messages, like screaming when scared or saying "ouch" when in pain, are mostly involuntary. Routine messages, such as polite greetings, involve some thought but are still automatic. Constructed communication requires more conscious effort and often serves relational and identity needs. However, more intention doesn't guarantee effectiveness, understanding, or ethical outcomes. Ethical communicators remain responsible for their messages' impacts, even if unintended. Communication has short- and long-term effects, which illustrates the next principle we will discuss: communication is irreversible.



Figure 1.4.1: The individual's posture suggests regret or emotional distress, possibly reflecting on something said that cannot be undone. This image underscores the principle that communication is irreversible; once a message is expressed, it can have lasting effects. Ethical communicators must remain aware that even unintended impacts carry responsibility. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Tellmeimok via Wikimedia Commons)

Once a message is sent, it can't be taken back. Characters in sitcoms and romantic comedies often use the line "Can we just start over?" As favorable as it would be to "redo" a failed or embarrassing communication encounter, it is impossible. Real communication can't be erased. If a joke offends someone, saying "I didn't mean it" doesn't undo the effect. Communication always leaves an impact, whether positive or negative. Conversely, when communication goes well, we often wish we could recreate it. However, in addition to communication being irreversible, it is also unrepeatable. Trying to recreate a past interaction exactly, like a successful job interview, won't yield the same results. Even if the words are the same, changing physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts alter the experience. Ever noticed how retelling a funny story often falls flat? That's communication's unrepeatable nature in action.

Communication is Guided by Culture and Context

As we learned earlier, context is a constantly changing part of the communication process. Both culture and context shape how we understand and define communication. Western cultures often focus more on the sender of a message than the receiver, and on the actual content rather than the surrounding context. These cultural priorities influence how communication is defined and modeled. Cultures also differ in their orientation toward individualism or collectivism. For example, the United States is typically seen as an individualistic culture that values personal expression and achievement, while Japan is considered a collectivistic culture that emphasizes group harmony and cohesion. These deep cultural values shape how people learn to communicate. In many collectivistic cultures, silence and nonverbal cues play a more important role. Regardless of the country, whether the U.S., Japan, or elsewhere, people grow up learning culturally specific ways of communicating that vary depending on the context. Next, we'll explore how communication is learned, the rules and norms that guide it, and the ethical considerations involved.

Communication is Learned

Most people are born with the capacity and ability to communicate, but everyone communicates in their own way. This is because communication is something we learn rather than something innate. As we've seen, communication patterns depend on the culture and context where they happen, and many cultures have their own distinct languages made up of symbols.

A key principle of communication is that it is symbolic. The words in language don't directly represent reality; instead, they stand for or symbolize things. The fact that communication varies so much among people, contexts, and cultures shows that meaning isn't built into the words themselves. For example, if you visit France and see the word poisson on a menu, unless you know French, you might not realize it means "fish." The French word looks nothing like the English word "fish," but both represent the same thing. If you judged only by how it looks, you might confuse it with the English word "poison" and avoid ordering it. A picture of a fish on the menu would help tourists understand because it directly shows the object, rather than symbolizing it.



Figure 1.4.2: This photo shows a kebab menu in France, featuring food names written in French and Turkish. To someone unfamiliar with these languages, the written words may not clearly convey their intended meaning. This highlights a key principle of communication: language is symbolic. Words are arbitrary signs that represent ideas or objects but don't directly reflect reality. Without shared linguistic understanding, their meaning can be unclear. Pictorial symbols, such as images of food, offer a more direct representation and help bridge language gaps, especially in cross-cultural contexts. (CC BY-SA 2.5; Stevage via Wikimedia Commons)

All symbolic communication is learned, negotiated, and dynamic. We know that the letters *b-o-o-k* refer to a bound object with pages, and *t-r-u-c-k* refers to a vehicle with a bed for hauling things. But if those meanings were swapped, if *t-r-u-c-k* meant a book and *b-o-o-k* meant a vehicle, it would still make sense because letters themselves don't carry inherent meaning; the meaning depends on what we agree they represent. Later chapters will explain more about how language works, but communication is definitely more than just words.

We are socialized into different languages, but we also speak different "languages" depending on the situation. For instance, in some cultures it's not appropriate to discuss family or health matters in public, while in small-town America, you might overhear people chatting about their kids or upcoming surgery in a grocery store. Some communication patterns are shared by many people, while others are unique to specific relationships, like best friends who have their own inside jokes and expressions that others don't understand. These examples show that communication is learned and shaped by the rules and norms we follow.

Rules and Norms

Earlier, we learned about the transaction model of communication and how social context, along with the roles and norms tied to it, strongly influence how we communicate. Whether it's verbal or nonverbal, mediated or face-to-face, our communication follows certain rules and norms.

Phatic communion is an instructive example of how we communicate under the influence of rules and norms (Senft, 2009). **Phatic communion** involves routine, scripted verbal exchanges that aim to establish social bonds rather than to actually share meaningful information.

Example 1.4.2: Bumping into your Professor

When passing your professor in the hall, the exchange may go as follows:

Student: “Hey, how are you?”

Professor: “Good, how are you?”

Student: “Good.”

What’s the real purpose of this exchange? It’s probably not to genuinely check on each other’s well-being. We have similar interactions when we comment on the weather or mention that it’s Monday. People often joke about phatic communion because it seems pointless on the surface.

In fact, the student and professor might as well just say:

Student: “Generic greeting question.”

Professor: “Generic greeting response and question.”

Student: “Generic response.”

This shows that phatic communion involves messages that don’t require much conscious thought, don’t carry significant content, and don’t generate deep meaning. So, if it seems so “pointless,” why do we engage in phatic communion?

The term phatic communion comes from the Greek word phatos, meaning “spoken,” and communion, meaning “connection or bond.” As we’ve discussed, communication helps us meet our relational needs. Just as people find communion through food or religion, they also find it through words. But the extent to which, and the situations in which, we engage in phatic communion are shaped by social rules and norms. For example, in the U.S., silence in social settings is often seen as awkward, so we fill that silence with seemingly meaningless words to meet social expectations. It’s also a norm to greet people when you see them, especially if you know them. We all understand that when someone asks, “How are you?” they’re not expecting us to unload all our problems or share our to-do list when someone says, “What’s up?” Instead, we stick to the social script with this routine type of exchange.



Figure 1.4.3: This image of two friends shaking hands captures a moment of phatic communion: a routine social exchange that builds connection rather than conveys deep information. Such greetings serve important relational functions, helping people maintain bonds and fulfill social norms. While the words exchanged may be brief or seemingly superficial (“How are you?” or “Good to see you”), they are essential in many cultures for signaling friendliness and belonging. In this way, communication, even when not content-heavy, helps meet relational needs and reflects shared social expectations. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Dhiriart via Wikimedia Commons)

Phatic communion, like many other aspects of communication, is culturally relative. Most cultures use phatic communion, but the topics and occasions vary. In the U.S., greeting scripts are common, while in other cultures, parting scripts might be more typical. Asking about someone’s well-being might be normal phatic communion in one culture, while in another, asking about the health of a person’s family could be the usual practice.

Communication has Ethical Implications

Another principle of communication that varies depending on culture and situation is that communication has ethical implications. Communication ethics involves the ongoing process of negotiating and reflecting on our actions and communication in terms of what we believe to be right or wrong. Aristotle once said, “In the arena of human life the honors and rewards fall to those who show their good qualities in action” (Pearson et al., 2006). His focus on actions highlights a key aspect of communication ethics. While ethics has been studied in philosophy since Aristotle’s time, its application to communication is more recent. In communication ethics, the main concern is the choices people make about right and wrong, rather than the philosophies, systems, or religions behind those choices. Often, ethics are a gray area. Though we often think about decisions as simply right or wrong, reality is rarely that clear-cut. Aristotle also said that we should act “to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way.” This idea connects closely to communication competence, which involves communicating effectively and appropriately.

Communication carries wide-ranging ethical consequences. Later in this book, we will explore the importance of ethical listening, avoiding plagiarism, presenting evidence honestly, and applying ethical standards in mass media and social media. These examples show that communication ethics plays a role across academic, professional, personal, and civic life.

When it comes to communication ethics, it’s difficult to label something as completely ethical or unethical. Every day we make choices that are more or less ethical, and sometimes we realize later that our decision wasn’t the most ethical one. These situations test our ethics and goodwill, since many times multiple options may seem appropriate, but we can only pick one. If, after reflecting on a choice, we see that a more ethical option was possible, does that make us bad people? While some actions are easier to classify, take murder, for example, communication is often less clear. Hurtful speech, or even speech some label as hate speech, can be protected under free speech laws. This highlights the complex relationship between protected speech, ethical speech, and the law. In some situations, people believe it is their ethical duty to share information they see as serving the public interest. For example, WikiLeaks has released thousands of classified documents on wars, intelligence, and diplomacy. WikiLeaks argues that this transparency holds leaders accountable and keeps the public informed, while government officials call the leaks criminal acts. Both sides view their own actions as ethical and the other side’s as unethical. So, who is right?



Figure 1.4.4: This photo shows a 2011 protest in Brisbane, Australia, in support of WikiLeaks. Demonstrators gathered to defend transparency and whistleblowing, believing that releasing classified information serves the public interest and holds governments accountable. However, government officials condemned the leaks as criminal, citing national security risks. The image captures the ethical tensions at the heart of communication: what some view as responsible and courageous, others deem reckless or dangerous. It illustrates the complex, often gray area between legal rights (like free speech) and ethical responsibility, underscoring how communication choices are rarely clear-cut and frequently open to interpretation. (CC BY 2.0; Rae Allen via Wikimedia Commons)

Since many ethical decisions depend on context, situation, and personal judgment, various professions have developed codes of ethics to guide members through gray areas. For instance, doctors take oaths to do no harm, and journalists follow guidelines promoting objectivity and protecting sources. While businesses have faced high-profile ethical scandals, business ethics has become an important subject in many schools, and more companies are adopting ethical guidelines for their employees.

Key Takeaways

- Communication is an essential, dynamic process that permeates all areas of life, academic, professional, personal, and civic, and fulfills critical physical, instrumental, relational, and identity needs. Understanding its multifaceted role enhances competence and success across these domains.
- Communication is socially learned, symbolic, and governed by cultural and contextual norms. It involves both intentional and unintentional messages, is irreversible and unrepeatable, and varies according to the social rules and expectations within different communities and settings.
- Effective communication requires mastering diverse skills such as listening, speaking, writing, and interpersonal interaction, which are crucial for academic achievement, career readiness, relationship building, and civic participation. Formal communication education provides a valuable competitive edge.
- Communication carries ethical implications across all areas of life and involves an ongoing process of negotiating what is right or wrong. Ethical communication requires critical reflection, contextual sensitivity, and a commitment to fairness and integrity, recognizing that many ethical decisions exist in gray areas and depend on personal judgment and situational factors.
- Communication shapes identity and social connection through symbolic self-presentation and relational exchanges. Recognizing communication as a performance influenced by culture and context empowers individuals to adapt, maintain relationships, and engage ethically in society.

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1.5: Communication Competence

Understanding Communication Competence

Communication competence refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts (Cooley & Roach, 1984). To better understand this definition, its components will be unpacked.

The first part deals with knowledge. The cognitive elements of competence include knowing how to do something and understanding why things are done the way they are (Hargie, 2011). Cognitive competence can be developed by observing and evaluating the actions of others as well as through instruction. Students are encouraged to observe the communication concepts they are learning in the communication practices of others and themselves. This helps bring concepts to life and enables evaluation of how communication in the real world matches up with communication concepts. As a repertoire of communication knowledge based on experiential and classroom learning is built, behavioral competence is also developed.

The second part of the definition is the ability to use communication knowledge. Individual factors affect the ability to perform any skill. Not everyone has the same athletic, musical, or intellectual ability. Physiological and psychological characteristics at the individual level affect competence. Age, maturity, and ability to communicate affect competence physiologically. Psychologically, mood, stress level, personality, and communication apprehension (anxiety regarding communication) affect competence (Cooley & Roach, 1984). These factors either help or hinder the application of learned communication knowledge to actual behavior. For example, public speaking anxiety may prevent someone from fully putting effective speaking strategies into practice.

The third part of the definition is the ability to adapt to various contexts. What is competent varies based on social and cultural context, making it impossible to have only one standard for communication competence (Cooley & Roach, 1984). Social variables such as status and power affect competence. For instance, in a social situation where one person, like a supervisor, has more power than another, such as an employee, the supervisor typically sets the standard for competence. Cultural variables such as race and nationality also affect competence. A Taiwanese woman who speaks English as her second language may be praised for her English competence in Taiwan but viewed as less competent in the United States due to her accent. In summary, although the definition of communication competence is clear, there are no universal definitions for how to be competent in any given situation, since competence varies at individual, social, and cultural levels.

Despite the fact that no guidelines or definitions of competence apply universally, the National Communication Association (NCA) has identified many aspects of communication competence. The primary focus has been on competencies related to speaking and listening, with the NCA noting that developing communication competence in these areas helps individuals in academic, professional, and civic contexts (Morreale, Rubin, & Jones, 1998).

NCA's Speaking and Listening Competencies

To aid colleges and universities in curriculum development and instruction strategies, the NCA defines what students should be able to do in terms of speaking and listening competencies by college graduation:

- State ideas clearly.
- Communicate ethically.
- Recognize when it is appropriate to communicate.
- Identify communication goals.
- Select the most appropriate and effective medium for communication.
- Demonstrate credibility.
- Identify and manage misunderstandings.
- Manage conflict.
- Be open-minded about another's point of view.
- Listen attentively.

These competencies provide a concrete way to assess speaking abilities and prepare for professional speaking and listening, which often focus on skills. Since communication occurs in many different contexts, such as interpersonal, group, intercultural,

and mediated contexts. More specific definitions of competence will be further discussed in the next section.

Developing Competence

Knowing the dimensions of competence is an important first step toward developing it. Everyone has some experience and knowledge about communication, gained both explicitly and implicitly. For example, people are explicitly taught the verbal codes used to communicate. However, although there are numerous rules and norms associated with nonverbal communication, explicit instruction on it is rare. Instead, nonverbal communication is learned by observing others and through trial and error. Competence involves verbal and nonverbal elements and applies to many situations and contexts. Communication competence is necessary to understand communication ethics, develop cultural awareness, use computer-mediated communication, and think critically. It involves knowledge, motivation, and skills. It is not enough to know what good communication consists of; motivation to reflect on and improve communication, as well as the skills to do so, are also needed.

Everyone has areas of skill and areas with deficiencies in communication. Most often, people can consciously decide to work on their deficiencies, which may require considerable effort. There are multiple stages of competence to assess: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence (Hargie, 2011). Before building a rich cognitive knowledge base and practicing skills in a particular area, **unconscious incompetence** occurs when one is unaware of incompetent communication. As knowledge and vocabulary about communication develop, **conscious incompetence** emerges when one realizes what should be done but is not doing it effectively. As skills increase, **conscious competence** develops once a communicator is communicating well while actively focusing on doing so. **Unconscious competence** occurs when communication happens successfully without effort. Reaching unconscious competence in one area or with one person does not guarantee permanent mastery, as new communication encounters often require adjustment, sometimes involving a few instances of conscious incompetence before advancing again.

Many students assume that knowing concepts means flawless communication, but everyone is imperfect and fallible. Expecting perfect communication after studying concepts sets people up for failure. However, reflecting on communication mistakes and learning from them helps improve competence. Noticing and reflecting on communication leads to greater awareness and progress.

One way to progress toward communication competence is by becoming a more mindful communicator. A mindful communicator actively and fluidly processes information, is sensitive to communication contexts and multiple perspectives, and adapts to novel communication situations (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Becoming more mindful offers many benefits, including achieving communication goals, detecting deception, avoiding stereotypes, and reducing conflict. Communication competence influences whether day-to-day communication goals are met. Various behaviors signal mindful communication; for example, asking an employee to paraphrase instructions shows awareness that verbal messages may be unclear, that people don't always listen actively, and that some may hesitate to ask for clarification to avoid embarrassment. Conversely, withdrawing from a romantic partner or engaging in passive-aggressive behavior during interpersonal conflict indicates a lack of mindful communication and often leads to predictable, avoidable conflict cycles. While people tend to assume others tell the truth, a degree of tentativeness and mindful monitoring of verbal and nonverbal cues helps detect deception; however, chronic suspicion does not indicate competence.

Managing Speech Anxiety

Whether preparing for a first presentation next week or in two months, many students in introductory communication courses face anxiety about communication or public speaking in particular.

Decades of research show that communication apprehension is common among college students (Priem & Solomon, 2009). **Communication apprehension** (CA) is the fear or anxiety experienced due to actual or imagined communication with others. CA includes multiple forms of communication, not just public speaking. About 15 to 20 percent of college students experience high trait CA, meaning they are generally anxious about communication. Additionally, 70 percent experience some trait CA, which means addressing communication anxiety in courses like this benefits the majority of students (Priem & Solomon, 2009).

Example 1.5.1: Confident and Composed

Scenario:
Maria is interviewing for a project management position. She knows that effective communication is critical to the role, especially managing teams and stakeholders. Although she experiences some anxiety (communication apprehension) before and during the interview, she uses mindful communication techniques she learned in her coursework: deep breathing to calm nerves, focusing on active listening to fully understand the interviewers' questions, and carefully organizing her responses to clearly state her ideas and experiences. Maria also adapts her language and tone based on the formal context and the interviewers' cues, showing cultural and contextual awareness.

Impact:
Her ability to remain composed, articulate her ideas clearly, and engage authentically impresses the hiring panel. Despite initial nervousness, her communication competence shines through, helping her receive a job offer.



Figure 1.5.1: A woman holds her head in distress, symbolizing the emotional and cognitive strain associated with communication anxiety. This expression of internal stress can reflect fear of judgment, public speaking apprehension, or difficulty expressing oneself in social or professional contexts. (CC0 1.0; MismibaTinasheMadando via Wikimedia Commons)

Public speaking anxiety is a type of CA that produces physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions when facing a real or imagined presentation (Bodie, 2010). Research on public speaking anxiety focuses on three key ways to address it: systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, and skills training (Bodie, 2010). Communication departments are typically the only departments addressing communication apprehension explicitly, which is important since CA is "related to negative academic consequences such as negative attitudes toward school, lower overall classroom achievement, lower final course grades, and higher college attrition rates" (Allen, Hunter, & Donohue, 2009).

Example 1.5.2: Improving the Work Environment

Scenario:
Jamal is a team leader at a marketing firm. A conflict arises between two team members about task responsibilities. Drawing on his communication competence training, Jamal approaches the situation mindfully: he encourages open dialogue, listens actively to each person's concerns, refrains from making snap judgments, and uses ethical communication to maintain respect. By paraphrasing their points and asking clarifying questions, Jamal helps the team find common ground and negotiate a fair solution.

Impact:
Jamal's skillful management of the conflict prevents escalation, improves team cohesion, and models how communication competence fosters effective collaboration in professional settings.

Additionally, CA can cause others to make unfavorable assumptions about communication competence. Even with intelligence, preparation, and motivation, CA and public speaking anxiety can detract from communication and affect how others perceive a speaker. CA is a common issue faced by many, so it is important to know that no one is alone.

Tips for Managing Speech Anxiety

- Remember, public speaking anxiety is common, so don't ignore it: confront it.
- It's impossible to literally "die of embarrassment." Audiences tend to be forgiving and understanding.
- It almost always feels worse than it actually looks.
- Take deep breaths; they release endorphins, which naturally fight the adrenaline causing anxiety.
- Dress both comfortably and professionally to enhance confidence.
- Channel nervousness into positive energy and motivation.
- Start outlining and researching early; better information leads to higher confidence.
- Practice and get feedback from a trusted source.
- Visualize success through positive thinking.
- Prepare thoroughly: practice is a speaker's best friend.

Key Takeaways

- Communication competence integrates knowledge, skillful application, and contextual adaptability, involving cognitive, behavioral, and social-cultural components essential across academic, professional, and personal settings.
- Competence develops through stages, from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence, requiring ongoing motivation, self-reflection, and mindful practice rather than mere theoretical understanding.
- Contextual factors such as social power dynamics and cultural differences significantly shape communication competence, making universal standards impossible; competence must be assessed relative to specific situations and audiences.
- The National Communication Association outlines core competencies including ethical communication, managing conflict, effective listening, and selecting appropriate communication methods, which guide educational outcomes and skill development.
- Communication apprehension, especially public speaking anxiety, is widespread among students but manageable through strategies like cognitive restructuring, desensitization, skills training, and mindfulness, improving both performance and confidence.

Attributions

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1.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

This chapter provides a foundational overview of communication as both a vital life skill and a dynamic academic discipline. Communication is the process of creating meaning through verbal and nonverbal symbols within varying cultural and contextual frameworks. It is studied from social, psychological, and cultural perspectives, reflecting its wide-ranging impact across academic, professional, personal, and civic domains. From ancient rhetorical traditions shaped by Aristotle and Cicero to modern studies of digital and mass media, communication scholarship has continually evolved alongside the mediums through which we share messages: oral, written, print, audiovisual, and now digital.

The field identifies five primary forms of communication: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass. Each form serves distinct functions, from self-reflection and relationship-building to public speaking and broad media dissemination. Communication also meets essential human needs, physical, instrumental, relational, and identity-based, through symbolic interaction, performance, and shared meaning-making. Since it is socially learned and guided by cultural norms, communication varies across contexts and communities. It is also irreversible and unrepeatable, underscoring the importance of mindfulness and responsibility in how we communicate.

To navigate the complexity of communication, scholars have developed models to illustrate how meaning is created and shared. The transmission model presents communication as a one-way process, the interaction model adds feedback and context, and the transaction model emphasizes simultaneous, co-created meaning shaped by relationships, roles, and environments. These models help us better understand not only how messages are exchanged, but how meaning is shaped by cultural, psychological, and social influences.

Developing strong communication skills enhances academic performance, career readiness, and interpersonal relationships. Employers consistently rank communication, especially skills like listening, writing, speaking, and collaboration, as top priorities. In today's hybrid and fast-changing work environments, emotional intelligence, intercultural competence, and adaptability are crucial for leadership and success. Formal study in communication offers valuable tools for personal development and a competitive edge in diverse professional fields such as media, business, education, government, and nonprofit work.

At the heart of communication effectiveness is communication competence: the ability to apply communication knowledge appropriately and skillfully across contexts. Competence involves cognitive understanding, behavioral skills, and contextual awareness, all of which develop gradually through self-reflection, motivation, and practice. Since communication standards vary by social and cultural context, competence must be flexible and ethically grounded. The National Communication Association outlines core competencies, such as ethical speaking, active listening, conflict management, and appropriate media use, as goals for student learning and professional preparation.

Finally, the chapter addresses communication apprehension, particularly public speaking anxiety, which affects a significant number of students. Recognizing that anxiety is common and manageable, the chapter offers research-based strategies like systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, and skills training. By developing mindfulness and reflecting on one's communication behaviors, individuals can reduce anxiety and become more confident, effective communicators.

To summarize, communication is a lifelong skill rooted in ethics, adaptability, and human connection. Understanding its principles, challenges, and contexts empowers individuals to communicate more competently and responsibly, building stronger relationships, achieving personal and professional goals, and contributing meaningfully to society.

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1.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 1

Figure 1.3.1: The Transmission Model of Communication

A smiley face labeled "Sender" on the left contains the word "Encoding." A straight, horizontal arrow labeled "'Hello!' = Message Channel" points right toward another smiley face labeled "Receiver," which contains the word "Decoding." Two yellow stars labeled "Noise" are positioned above and below the message channel, indicating potential interference.

Figure 1.3.2: The Interaction Model of Communication

Two smiley faces, each labeled "Sender–Receiver," appear on the left and right sides of the diagram. Both smiley faces contain the words "Encoding" at the top and "Decoding" at the bottom, indicating the dual roles of both participants. A straight horizontal arrow labeled "'How are you?' = Message" points from left to right, representing the initial message sent through a communication channel. A curved arrow labeled "Feedback Channel" loops back from right to left with the message "'Fine, thank you.' = Message," representing the receiver's response. Two yellow stars labeled "Noise" appear near both the message and feedback channels. A large bracket on the left is labeled "Psychological Context," and a corresponding bracket on the right is labeled "Physical Context," signifying the influence of internal and external factors.

Figure 1.3.3: The Transaction Model of Communication

Two smiley faces labeled "Communicator" appear on the left and right sides of the diagram, representing equal participants in the communication process. Between them is a green rectangle labeled "Co-creation of meaning," symbolizing the collaborative development of shared understanding. Four gray arrows point outward from the rectangle. The left arrow is labeled "Social Context," the right arrow "Cultural Context," the upward arrow "Physical and Psychological Context," and the downward arrow "Relational Context." These arrows indicate the multiple, overlapping contexts that shape how meaning is co-created between communicators.

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1.9: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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1.9.1: Exercises

1.1: Understanding Communication Studies

1. Students individually write their own definition of communication in 2–3 sentences. Then, in pairs, compare definitions and discuss how their personal experiences of communication (texting, speaking, social media) fit into each of the five forms: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, mass.
2. In small groups, students create a visual timeline on the board or large paper, placing the Oral, Manuscript, Print, Audiovisual, and Internet Eras in order, adding at least one key development or example for each. Groups present to the class.
3. Assign groups different communication forms (intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, mass). Each group creates a 2–3 minute skit or demonstration showing that form in a real-life context (e.g., planning a party = group, giving a speech = public). After each demo, the class identifies the form and key characteristics.

1.2: Applying Communication Studies

1. Students select one area of communication research mentioned in the text (e.g., media habits, digital deception, environmental messaging, organizational communication). Individually or in pairs, they summarize the research topic, identify a real-life application, and create a 1-minute class presentation explaining why this research matters.
2. In small groups, students are given one of the career scenarios (e.g., nonprofit associate, marketing coordinator, hybrid workplace employee). Each group role-plays a scenario where communication skills make a difference: e.g., resolving conflict in a remote team meeting, giving a brief persuasive presentation, or answering interview questions. Debrief by discussing which communication strategies were most effective.
3. Students create a two-column chart. Column 1 lists specific communication skills (e.g., active listening, conflict resolution, public speaking, storytelling, intercultural awareness). Column 2 describes a situation in personal, academic, or professional life where that skill could be applied. Students share a few examples with a partner.

1.3: The Communication Process

1. Provide students with 3 short scenarios (e.g., listening to a podcast, texting a friend, participating in a Zoom meeting with back-and-forth discussion). Students work in pairs to determine which communication model (transmission, interaction, transaction) best fits each scenario. They must explain why, referencing key components like feedback, context, or co-creation of meaning.
2. In small groups, students encode a simple message verbally or visually and pass it through multiple group members. Introduce “noise” intentionally (misheard words, misinterpreted gestures, or background distractions). After the final receiver decodes the message, the group compares the original and final messages, discussing how noise impacted understanding.
3. Students create a short role-play of a conversation (e.g., inviting a classmate to a study session). Each time they perform it, they alter one context: physical (loud cafeteria vs. quiet library), psychological (stressed vs. relaxed), relational (stranger vs. friend), and cultural (differences in norms or expectations). Afterward, the class discusses how each context changed the communication process.

1.4: Communication Principles

1. Students list three recent communication encounters they experienced (academic, professional, personal, or civic). For each, identify which needs were being addressed: Physical, Instrumental, Relational, or Identity. Students then discuss in pairs how communication strategies could be applied to improve the outcomes.
2. Present students with 2–3 communication scenarios that involve ethical gray areas, such as: deciding whether to report a classmate cheating, sharing confidential work information to serve the public interest, or responding to a friend’s insensitive comment online. Students role-play the scenario in small groups, then discuss how ethical principles, context, and judgment shaped their decisions.
3. Students pair up and engage in brief exchanges of phatic communication, such as greeting, small talk about the weather, or casual check-ins. Afterward, they analyze: How did this communication fulfill relational needs? How did social norms and context shape the interaction? Optionally, students can repeat the exercise in a different cultural or relational context (e.g.,

with a stranger or a peer from another country) to observe differences.

1.5: Communication Competence

1. Students reflect on a recent communication encounter (e.g., a group project, job interview, or family discussion). Identify which NCA competencies were used (e.g., ethical communication, conflict management, attentive listening). Rate their own performance: unconscious incompetence → conscious incompetence → conscious competence → unconscious competence. Write a brief plan for improving one area.
2. In pairs, students role-play a scenario with potential conflict or misunderstanding (e.g., a team member missing a deadline, a roommate dispute, or intercultural miscommunication). One student practices mindful communication techniques: active listening, paraphrasing, observing nonverbal cues, adapting to context. The other provides feedback on how clearly and effectively the message was received.
3. Students prepare a 1–2 minute presentation on a familiar topic (e.g., a hobby, a recent class assignment, or a current event). Practice strategies for managing anxiety: deep breathing, visualization, cognitive restructuring, and rehearsal. Present to small groups for low-stress feedback.

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1.9.2: Discussion Questions

1.1: Understanding Communication Studies

1. How does this textbook's definition of communication include both verbal and nonverbal elements? Can you think of examples from your own life where nonverbal communication was more important than words?
2. Looking at the historical eras of communication, how do you think each technological advance (writing, printing press, radio, internet) changed the way people interact and share meaning? Which era do you think had the most significant social impact and why?
3. Mass communication allows one person or organization to reach millions. What responsibilities do communicators have when using mass media? Can you give an example of a time when mass communication influenced your opinion or behavior? Was this influence positive or negative?

1.2: Applying Communication Studies

1. Based on the examples in the text, how do communication skills impact both personal relationships and professional opportunities? Can you think of a time when communication skills helped or hurt you in either setting?
2. The text emphasizes the diversity of communication research. Why do you think communication as a field spans topics from digital media to environmental messaging to workplace collaboration? How does this interdisciplinarity make the field stronger or more challenging?
3. Imagine you're preparing for a job interview or workplace presentation. Which communication skills discussed here would you focus on developing first, and why? How would you demonstrate those skills to stand out?

1.3: The Communication Process

1. How do the transmission, interaction, and transaction models differ in the way they describe participants' roles and the flow of messages? Can you give examples of situations in your life that fit each model?
2. Why is it important for communicators to consider not just the message but also context, feedback, and co-construction of meaning? How might ignoring these factors lead to misunderstandings?
3. Think of a recent conversation where miscommunication occurred. Using the three models, analyze what went wrong. Was there noise, lack of feedback, or misinterpretation of context? How could awareness of these models improve your future communication?

1.4: Communication Principles

1. How does communication fulfill physical, instrumental, relational, and identity needs in your own life? Can you provide examples where these needs overlapped?
2. Why is communication considered irreversible and unrepeatable? How do these principles influence the way you approach both personal and professional interactions?
3. Think about a time you encountered an ethical dilemma in communication (e.g., social media, school, work, or civic participation). How did context, culture, and norms influence your decision? Would you handle it differently now?

1.5: Communication Competence

1. Think about a time when communication apprehension affected your ability to express ideas. How could mindful communication strategies have changed the outcome?
2. How do social power dynamics, cultural differences, or situational contexts influence what is considered competent communication? Can you give examples from your own life?
3. Competent communication involves both effectiveness and appropriateness. Have you ever faced a situation where a message was effective but not appropriate, or appropriate but not effective? How would you handle it differently now?

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2: COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTION

Overview

This chapter on perception will help us better understand ourselves, our environment, and those around us. Stepping away and objectively looking at the perception process will help us more accurately perceive ourselves and others. By discussing strategies to enhance self-perception and perception of others, we can improve our communication skills and foster more meaningful connections. Employing techniques such as perception checking allows us to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and those around us, leading to clearer and more effective communication. Exploring concepts such as self-concept, socializing forces, and self-fulfilling prophecies helps us recognize how our perceptions can be influenced and distorted. By developing empathy, active listening skills, and self-awareness through self-reflection, we can become effective communicators, whether in our personal, academic, or professional relationships.

Chapter Goals

- Understand the big picture of how perception works and what influences the process.
- Examine self-concept, the Self-Discrepancy Theory, and Self-Presentation to understand better how we perceive ourselves.
- Identify the reasons why we sometimes perceive others accurately and other times inaccurately.
- Analyze how self-disclosure impacts not only how we see others but also our own self-concept, as demonstrated with the Johari Window.
- Establish ways to improve our perception of ourselves and others.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Active Strategy
- Attribution
- Blind Self
- Closed Self
- Cultural Group
- Empathetic Listening
- First Impressions
- Interactive Strategy
- Looking Glass Self
- Motivation
- Open Self
- Passive Strategy
- Perception Checking
- Personality
- Punctuation
- Salience
- Schemata
- Selective Distortion
- Self-Concept
- Self-Discrepancy Theory
- Self-Disclosure
- Self-Efficacy

- Self-Enhancement Bias
- Self-Esteem
- Self-Fulfilling Prophecy
- Self-Presentation
- Social Comparison Theory
- Socializing Forces
- Stereotypes
- The Johari Window
- Uncertainty Reduction Theory
- Unknown Self

2.1: The Perception Process

2.2: Perceiving Yourself

2.3: Perceiving Others

2.4: Self-Disclosure's impact on perception

2.5: Improving Perception

2.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

2.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 2

2.8: References

2.9: Teacher Resources

2.9.1: Exercises

2.9.2: Discussion Questions

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2.1: The Perception Process

Interacting with the World

Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process includes the perception of select stimuli that pass through our perceptual filters, are organized into our existing structures and patterns, and are then interpreted based on previous experiences. Although perception is a largely cognitive and psychological process, how we perceive the people and objects around us affects our communication. We respond differently to an object or person that we perceive favorably than we do to something we find unfavorable. But how do we filter through the mass amounts of incoming information, organize it, and derive meaning from what makes it through our perceptual filters and into our social realities?

Selecting Information

We take in information through all five of our senses, but our perceptual field (the world around us) includes so many stimuli that it is impossible for our brains to process and make sense of it all. So, as information comes in through our senses, various factors influence what actually continues through the perception process (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). Selecting is the first part of the perception process, in which we focus our attention on certain incoming sensory information. Think about how, out of many other possible stimuli to pay attention to, you may hear a familiar voice in the hallway, see a pair of shoes you want to buy in a store window, or smell something cooking for dinner when you get home from work. We quickly cut through and push to the background all kinds of sights, smells, sounds, and other stimuli, but how do we decide what to select and what to leave out?

We tend to pay attention to information that is salient. **Salience** is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context. The thing attracting our attention can be abstract, like a concept, or concrete, like an object. For example, an individual's identity as an indigenous person may become salient when they are protesting at the Columbus Day parade in Denver, Colorado. Or a bright flashlight shining in your face while camping at night is sure to be salient. The degree of salience depends on three features (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Lastly, expectations affect what we find salient.

Visual and Aural Stimulation

It is probably not surprising to learn that visually and/or aurally stimulating things become salient in our perceptual field and get our attention. Creatures ranging from fish to hummingbirds are attracted to things like silver spinners on fishing poles or red and yellow bird feeders. Having our senses stimulated isn't always a positive thing, though. Think about the couple that won't stop talking during the movie or the upstairs neighbor whose heavy walking shakes your ceiling at night. In short, stimuli can be attention-getting in a productive or distracting way.

As communicators, we can use this knowledge to our benefit by minimizing distractions when we have something important to say. It's probably better to have a serious conversation with a significant other in a quiet place rather than a crowded food court. In public speaking, altering the rate, volume, and pitch of your voice, known as vocal variety, can help keep your audience engaged, as can gestures and movement. Conversely, nonverbal adaptors, or nervous movements we do to relieve anxiety, like pacing or twirling our hair, can be distracting. Aside from minimizing distractions and delivering our messages enthusiastically, the content of our communication also affects salience.

Needs and Interests

We tend to pay attention to information we perceive as meeting our needs or interests. This type of selective attention can help us meet instrumental needs and get things done. When you need to speak with a financial aid officer about your scholarships and loans, you sit in the waiting room and listen for your name to be called. Paying close attention to whose name is called means you can be ready to start your meeting and hopefully get your business handled. When we don't think certain messages meet our needs, stimuli that would normally get our attention may be completely lost.

Example 2.1.1 Tuning Out

Imagine you are in the grocery store and you hear someone say your name. You turn around, only to hear that person say, “Finally! I said your name three times. I thought you forgot who I was!” A few seconds before, when you were focused on figuring out which kind of orange juice to get, you were attending to the various pulp options to the point that you tuned other stimuli out, even something as familiar as the sound of someone calling your name.

Again, as communicators, especially in persuasive contexts, we can use this to our advantage by making clear how our message or proposition meets the needs of our audience members. Whether a sign helps us find the nearest gas station, the sound of a ringtone helps us find our missing cell phone, or a speaker tells us how avoiding processed foods will improve our health, we select and attend to information that meets our needs.

We also find salient information that interests us. Of course, many times, stimuli that meet our needs are also interesting. Still, it’s worth discussing these two items separately because sometimes we find things interesting that don’t necessarily meet our needs. I’m sure we’ve all gotten sucked into a television show, video game, or random project and paid attention to that at the expense of something that actually meets our needs, like cleaning or spending time with a significant other. Paying attention to things that interest us but don’t meet specific needs seems like the basic formula for procrastination that we are all familiar with.

In many cases, we know what interests us, and we automatically gravitate toward stimuli that match it. Because of this tendency, we often end up being forced into or accidentally experiencing something new in order to create or discover new interests. For example, you may not realize you are interested in Asian history until you are required to take such a course and have an engaging professor who sparks that interest in you. Or you may accidentally stumble on a new area of interest when you take a class you wouldn’t otherwise because it fits into your schedule. As communicators, you can take advantage of this perceptual tendency by adapting your topic and content to the interests of your audience.

Expectations

The relationship between salience and expectations is a little more complex. Basically, we can find expected things salient and find things that are unexpectedly salient. While this may sound confusing, a couple of examples should illustrate this point. If you are expecting a package to be delivered, you might pick up on the slightest noise of a truck engine or someone’s footsteps approaching your front door. Since we expect something to happen, we may be extra tuned in to clues that it is coming. In terms of the unexpected, if you have a shy and soft-spoken friend who you overhear raising the volume and pitch of his voice while talking to another friend, you may pick up on that and assume that something out of the ordinary is going on. For something unexpected to become salient, it has to reach a certain threshold of difference. If you walked into your regular class and there were one or two more students than usual, you might not even notice. If you walked into your class and there was someone dressed up as a wizard, you would probably notice. So, if we expect to experience something out of the routine, like a package delivery, we will find stimuli related to that expectation salient. If we experience something that we weren’t expecting and that is significantly different from our routine experiences, then we will likely find it salient. We can also apply this concept to our communication. There is a middle area where slight deviations from routine experiences may go unnoticed because we aren’t expecting them. To go back to the earlier example, if you aren’t expecting a package, and you regularly hear vehicle engines and sidewalk foot traffic outside your house, those pretty routine sounds wouldn’t be as likely to catch your attention, even if there was slightly more or less traffic than expected. This is because our expectations are often based on previous experience and patterns we have observed and internalized, which allows our brains to go on “autopilot” sometimes and fill in things that are missing or overlook extra things.

Example 2.1.2 Experiences Shape Our Perception

Look at the following sentence and read it aloud: "**Percpetoin is bsaed on pateetrns, maening we otfen raech a cocnlsuion witouht cosnidreing ecah indviidaul elmenet**." Notice how even though nearly all of the words are misspelled, you can still read the sentence. That's because your perception of what you see is based on decades of reading similar words. When we first learned to read and write, we learned letter by letter. A teacher or parent would show us a card or screen with *A-P-P-L-E* written on it, and we would sound it out. Over time, we learned the patterns of letters and sounds and could see combinations of letters and pronounce the word quickly. Since we know what to expect when we see a certain pattern of letters, we don’t take the time to look at each letter.

Now that we know how we select stimuli, let's turn our attention to how we organize the information we receive.

Organizing Information

Organizing is the second part of the perception process, in which we sort and categorize information that we perceive based on innate and learned cognitive patterns. Three ways we sort things into patterns are by using proximity, similarity, and difference (Coren, 1980). In terms of proximity, we tend to think that things that are close together go together. For example, have you ever been waiting to be helped in a business, and the clerk assumes that you and the person standing beside you are together? The slightly awkward moment usually ends when you and the other person in line look at each other, then back at the clerk, and one of you explains that you are not together. Even though you may have never met that other person in your life, the clerk used a basic perceptual organizing cue to group you together because you were standing in proximity to one another.

Example 2.1.3 Are They Really the Same?

We tend to group things together that are similar. In other words, we tend to think similar-looking or similar-acting things belong together. For instance, if three friends meet for coffee and are about the same age, appear to be the same race, and all have long brown hair and glasses, the barista may assume they are siblings. Even though their features are very different, since the salient features to the barista are similar, they assume the three women are related.

We also tend to organize the information that we take in based on differences. That means we may assume that whatever looks or acts different doesn't belong with the group. These perceptual errors with people can be awkward, even offensive, at times. For instance, if a person of color attends a conference where the vast majority of attendees are white, because they don't "belong" with the group, an impression is formed based on the other person's perception of this difference. So rather than being asked about their professional background, they could be asked to clean up a spilled drink.

These strategies for organizing information are so common that they are built into how we teach our children basic skills and how we function in our daily lives. Remember when you had to look at pictures in grade school and determine which things went together and which didn't belong. If you think of the literal act of organizing something, like your desk at home or work, we follow these same strategies. If you have a bunch of papers and mail on the top of your desk, you will likely sort papers into separate piles for separate classes or put bills in a separate place from personal mail. You may have one drawer for pens, pencils, and other supplies, and another drawer for files. In this case, you are grouping items based on similarities and differences. You may also group things based on proximity, for example, by putting financial items like your checkbook, a calculator, and your pay stubs in one area so you can update your budget efficiently. In summary, we simplify information and look for patterns to help us more efficiently communicate and get through life.

Simplification and categorization based on patterns isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, without this capability, we would likely not have the ability to speak, read, or engage in other complex cognitive/behavioral functions. Our brain innately categorizes and files information and experiences away for later retrieval, and different parts of the brain are responsible for different sensory experiences. In short, it is natural for things to group together in some ways. There are differences among people, and looking for patterns helps us in many practical ways. However, the judgments we place on various patterns and categories are not natural; they are learned and culturally and contextually relative. Our perceptual patterns do become unproductive and even unethical when the judgments we associate with certain patterns are based on stereotypical or prejudicial thinking.

We also organize interactions and interpersonal experiences based on our firsthand experiences. When two people experience the same encounter differently, misunderstandings and conflict may result. **Punctuation** refers to the structuring of information into a timeline to determine the cause (stimulus) and effect (response) of our communication interactions (Sillars, 1980). Applying this concept to interpersonal conflict can help us see how the perception process extends beyond the individual to the interpersonal level. This concept also helps illustrate how organization and interpretation can happen together and how interpretation can influence how we organize information and vice versa.

Where does a conflict begin and end? The answer to this question depends on how the people involved in the conflict punctuate, or structure, their conflict experience. Punctuation differences can often escalate conflict, which can lead to a variety of relationship problems (Watzlawick et al., 1967).

Example 2.1.4 Out of Sync

Patricia and Bao are on a project team at work and have a deadline approaching. Patricia has been working on the project over the weekend in anticipation of her meeting with Bao first thing Monday morning. She has had some questions along the way and has emailed Bao for clarification and input, but he hasn't responded. On Monday morning, Patricia walks into the meeting room, sees Bao, and says, "I've been working on this project all weekend and needed your help. I e-mailed you three times! What were you doing?" Bao responds, "I had no idea you e-mailed me. I was gone all weekend on a camping trip." In this instance, the conflict started for Patricia two days ago and has just started for Bao. So, for the two of them to most effectively manage this conflict, they need to communicate so that their punctuation, or where the conflict started for each one, is clear and matches up. In this example, Patricia made an impression about Bao's level of commitment to the project based on an interpretation she made after selecting and organizing incoming information. Being aware of how we punctuate conflict is an important part of perception checking, which we will discuss later. Let's now take a closer look at how interpretation plays into the perception process.

Interpreting Information

Although selecting and organizing incoming stimuli happens very quickly, and sometimes without much conscious thought, interpretation can be a much more deliberate and conscious step in the perception process. Interpretation is the third part of the perception process, in which we assign meaning to our experiences using mental structures known as schemata. **Schemata** are like databases of stored, related information that we use to interpret new experiences. We all have fairly complicated schemata that have developed over time as small units of information combine to make more meaningful complexes of information.



Figure 2.1.1: Many variables affect your perception of this dandelion, reflecting a rainbow of colors. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Gpaolumu via Wikimedia Commons)

We have an overall schema about education and how to interpret experiences with teachers and classmates. This schema started developing before we even went to preschool, based on things that parents, peers, and the media told us about school. For example, you learned that certain symbols and objects like an apple, a ruler, a calculator, and a notebook are associated with being a student or teacher. You learned new concepts like grades and recess, and you engaged in new practices like doing homework, studying, and taking tests. You also formed new relationships with teachers, administrators, and classmates. As you progressed through your education, your schema adapted to the changing environment. How smooth or troubling schema reevaluation and revision is varies from situation to situation and person to person. For example, some students adapt their schema relatively easily as they move from elementary to middle to high school, and on to college, and are faced with new expectations for behavior and academic engagement. Other students don't adapt as easily, and holding on to their old schema creates problems as they try to interpret new information through an old, incompatible schema. We've all been in a similar situation at some point in our lives, so we know that revising our schemata can be stressful and that such revision takes effort and usually involves some mistakes, disappointments, and frustrations.

But the ability to adapt our schemata is a sign of cognitive complexity, an important part of communication competence. So, even though the process may be challenging, it can also be a time for learning and growth. It's important to be aware of schemata because our interpretations affect our behavior. For example, if you are doing a group project for class and you perceive a group member to be shy based on your schema of how shy people communicate, you may avoid giving him presentation responsibilities in your group project because you do not think shy people make good public speakers. Schemata also guide our interactions, providing a script for our behaviors. We know, in general, how to act and communicate in a waiting room, in a classroom, at our job, or on a first date.



Figure 2.1.2: Medical staff wearing white coats show the patient that these are trained personnel whom she can trust. Alternative description of image. (CC BY 2.0; Samantha Cristoforetti via Wikimedia Commons)

As we have seen, schemata are used to interpret others' behavior and form impressions about who they are as a person. To help this process along, we often solicit information from people to help us place them into a preexisting schema. In the United States and many other Western cultures, people's identities are often closely tied to what they do for a living. When we introduce others or ourselves, our occupation is usually one of the first things we mention. Think about how your communication with someone might differ if he or she were introduced to you as an artist, a car mechanic, or an accountant. Notice in Figure 2.1.2 that we can identify the medical staff because they are wearing white lab coats. In this culture, the "uniform" signifies authority and knowledge in a medical care setting. We make similar interpretations based on where people are from, their age, their race, and other social and cultural factors. We will learn more about how culture, gender, and other factors influence our perceptions as we continue through the chapter. In summary, we have schemata about individuals, groups, places, and things, and these schemata filter our perceptions before, during, and after interactions. As schemata are retrieved from memory, they are executed, like computer programs or apps on your phone, to help us interpret the world around us. Just like computer programs and apps must be regularly updated to improve their functioning, competent communicators update and adapt their schemata as they have new experiences.

Example 2.1.5 A Better Way

For instance, in the healthcare field, the perception of both the patient and the healthcare worker plays a crucial role in patient care. A nurse may walk into a patient's room and immediately notice something out of the ordinary—an altered facial expression, a shift in tone, or silence that replaces usual chatter. Based on clinical training and prior patient interactions, the nurse might interpret these cues in body language or verbal communication as signs of discomfort or emotional distress. While healthcare workers are trained to avoid snap judgments and instead ask clarifying questions to ensure accurate interpretation, assumptions based on stereotypes—such as believing that all older patients are forgetful or all younger patients are overly anxious—can lead to perceptual errors.

The nurse can also inadvertently commit perceptual errors by interpreting subtle cues in body language or tone of voice through their own cultural lens. For example, a nurse from a Western culture may perceive direct eye contact as a sign of attentiveness and respect, while a patient from an Eastern culture may view it as confrontational or disrespectful. These

cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings if not recognized and addressed. By becoming aware of these cultural differences, healthcare workers can provide more culturally sensitive care, avoid misinterpretations, and build stronger relationships with patients.

Likewise, a patient making assumptions about their nurse based on stereotypes or personal biases, such as assuming that a male nurse may be less empathetic than a female nurse, can lead to perceptual errors and diminish their care. The patient may be less likely to openly communicate their concerns or needs, leading to misunderstandings and inadequate treatment. This assumption can also create a barrier to building trust and rapport with the male nurse, impacting the patient's overall comfort and satisfaction with their care. When clinicians and patients remain open to revising their perceptions, they're more likely to avoid perceptual errors. Patients will receive better care and the clinician will be better equipped to build trust and improve patient outcomes (Keutchafo et al., 2022).

Key Takeaways

- Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process affects our communication because we respond to stimuli differently, whether they are objects or persons, based on how we perceive them.
- Given the massive amounts of stimuli taken in by our senses, we only select a portion of the incoming information to organize and interpret. We select information based on salience. We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs and interests. Expectations also influence what information we select.
- We organize information that we select into patterns based on proximity, similarity, and difference.
- We interpret information using schemata, which allow us to assign meaning to information based on accumulated knowledge and previous experience.

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2.2: Perceiving Yourself

Creating Our Self-image

Just as our perception of others affects how we communicate, so does our perception of ourselves. But what influences our self-perception? How much of our self is a product of our own making, and how much of it is constructed based on how others react to us? How do we present ourselves to others in ways that maintain our sense of self or challenge how others see us? We will begin to answer these questions in this section as we explore self-concept, self-esteem, and self-presentation.

Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the overall idea of who a person thinks they are. If I said, "Tell me who you are," your answers would be clues to how you see yourself--your self-concept. Each person has an overall self-concept that might be encapsulated in a short list of overarching characteristics that they find important. But each person's self-concept is also influenced by context, meaning we think differently about ourselves depending on the situation. In some situations, personal characteristics, such as our abilities, personality, and other distinguishing features, will best describe who we are. You might consider yourself laid-back, traditional, funny, open-minded, or driven, or you might label yourself a leader or a thrill seeker. In other situations, our self-concept may be tied to group or cultural membership. For example, you might consider yourself a Southerner, a knitter, or a hiker, like the group in Figure 2.2.1, posing mid-mountain hike for a group picture.



Figure 2.2.1: The self-concepts of this group of hikers are reflected in their gear and surroundings. Alternative description of image. (CC BY 2.0; Frank Kovalchek via Wikimedia Commons)

Our self-concept is also formed through our interactions with others and their reactions to us. The concept of the **looking glass self** explains that we see ourselves reflected in other people's reactions to us and then form our self-concept based on how we believe other people see us (Cooley, 1902). This reflective process of building our self-concept is based on what other people have actually said, such as "You're a good listener," and other people's actions, such as coming to you for advice. These thoughts evoke emotional responses that feed into our self-concept. For example, you may think, "I'm glad that people can count on me to listen to their problems."

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. **Social comparison theory** states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference (Hargie, 2011). In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of

comparison and evaluation isn't necessarily bad, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group isn't appropriate. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups for social comparison. If someone wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, they may be discouraged by their difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge themselves as inferior, which could negatively affect their self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

We also engage in social comparison based on similarity and difference. Since self-concept is context specific, similarity may be desirable in some situations and difference more desirable in others. Factors like age and personality may influence whether or not we want to fit in or stand out. Although we compare ourselves to others throughout our lives, adolescent and teen years usually bring new pressure to be similar to or different from particular reference groups. Think of all the cliques in high school and how people voluntarily and involuntarily broke off into groups based on popularity, interest, culture, or grade level. Some kids in your high school probably wanted to fit in with and be similar to other people in the marching band, but be different from the football players. Conversely, athletes were probably more apt to compare themselves, in terms of similar athletic ability, to other athletes rather than kids in choir. But social comparison can be complicated by perceptual influences. As we learned earlier, we organize information based on similarity and difference, but these patterns don't always hold true. Even though students involved in athletics and students involved in arts may seem very different, a dancer or singer may also be very athletic, perhaps even more so than a member of the football team. As with other aspects of perception, there are positive and negative consequences of social comparison.

We generally want to know where we fall in terms of ability and performance as compared to others, but what people do with this information and how it affects self-concept varies. Not all people feel they need to be at the top of the list, but some won't stop until they get the high score on the video game or set a new school record in a track-and-field event. Some people strive to be first chair in the clarinet section of the orchestra, while another person may be content to be second chair. The education system promotes social comparison through grades and rewards such as honor rolls and dean's lists.

We tend to try to maintain internal consistency, which means we act in ways that match up with our self-concept. If our self-concept is that we are a good student, we say to ourselves, "I can't believe I got such a low grade. This 'D' isn't like me. I need to do better." But if our self-concept is that we are a bad student, then a "D" is acceptable, and we feel no need to improve. As you can see in this example, those evaluations we place on our self-concept can lead to cycles of thinking and acting. This cause-and-effect also influences our self-esteem and self-efficacy, which make up the self-concept.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the judgments and evaluations we make about our self-concept. While self-concept is a broad description of the self, self-esteem is more specifically an evaluation of the self (Byrne, 1988). Like self-concept, self-esteem has general and specific elements. Some people are more likely to evaluate themselves positively, while others are more likely to evaluate themselves negatively (Brockner, 1988). More specifically, our self-esteem varies across our lifespan and across contexts. In Figure 2.2.2, these Boy Scouts are receiving an Eagle award, which is the highest award possible in Scouting and is only earned after many years of hard work and achievements. This prestigious award would likely boost the recipients' self-esteem.



Figure 2.2.2: The Boy Scouts' self-esteem is high during their Eagle award ceremony. Alternative description of image. (Public Domain; Frank Kovalchek via Wikimedia Commons)

How we think and act is also affected by how we judge ourselves. But each positive and negative judgment we make about ourselves doesn't have the same impact. If we evaluate ourselves about something that is not an important part of our self-concept, then our self-esteem is unlikely to be affected. Conversely, a judgment about something that is a big part of our self-concept will have a powerful positive or negative effect on our self-concept. For instance, if you enjoy the outdoors and periodically camp and hike but only as an occasional hobby, then any lack of knowledge or skill will have very little negative impact on your self-concept. But if you are a professional trail guide, then a deficiency of skill and knowledge of the outdoors could significantly negatively impact your self-concept.

However, it's not just the importance of the subject that affects our thinking. For instance, if you are a professional trail guide who misjudged the amount of time your group would take to complete a hike, which nearly resulted in finishing the hike in the dark, your ability to improve or not is determined by your self-esteem. Those with low self-esteem may see improvement as hopeless and self-limit their assignments or even quit a job they love. Those with higher self-esteem are more likely to react to negative criticism by working harder, by becoming a better judge of the hiking pace for various groups. In fact, in professional contexts, people with higher self-esteem are more likely to work harder based on negative feedback, are less negatively affected by work stress, are able to handle workplace conflict better, and are better able to work independently and solve problems (Brockner, 1988). Self-esteem isn't the only factor that contributes to our self-concept; perceptions about our competence also play a role in developing our sense of self.

Self-Efficacy

Self-Efficacy refers to the judgments people make about their ability to perform a task within a specific context (Bandura, 1997). Judgments about our self-efficacy influence our self-esteem, which influences our self-concept.

Example 2.2.1 Building Momentum

Pedro did a good job on his first college speech. During a meeting with his professor, Pedro says he is confident going into the next speech and believes he will do well. This skill-based assessment is an indication that Pedro has a high level of self-efficacy related to public speaking. If he does well on the speech, the praise from his classmates and professor will reinforce his self-efficacy and lead him to positively evaluate his speaking skills, which will contribute to his self-esteem. By the end of the class, Pedro likely thinks of himself as a good public speaker, which may then become an important part of his self-concept.

Throughout these points of connection, it's important to remember that self-perception affects how we communicate, behave, and perceive other things. Pedro's increased feeling of self-efficacy may give him more confidence in his delivery, which will likely result in positive feedback that reinforces his self-perception. He may start to perceive his professor more positively

since they share an interest in public speaking, and he may begin to notice other people's speaking skills more during class presentations and public lectures. Over time, he may even start to think about changing his major to communication or pursuing career options that incorporate public speaking, which would further integrate being "a good public speaker" into his self-concept. Hopefully, you can see that these interconnections can create powerful positive or negative cycles. While some of this process is under our control, much of it is also shaped by the people in our lives.

The verbal and nonverbal feedback we get from people affects our feelings of self-efficacy and our self-esteem. As we saw in Pedro's example, being given positive feedback can increase our self-efficacy, which may make us more likely to engage in a similar task in the future (Hargie, 2011). Obviously, negative feedback can lead to decreased self-efficacy and a declining interest in engaging with the activity again. In general, people adjust their expectations about their abilities based on the feedback they get from others. Positive feedback tends to make people raise their expectations for themselves, and negative feedback does the opposite, which ultimately affects behaviors and creates the cycle. When feedback from others is different from how we view ourselves, additional cycles may develop that impact self-esteem and self-concept.

Self-discrepancy theory states that people have beliefs about and expectations for their actual and potential selves that do not always match up with what they actually experience (Higgins, 1987). To understand this theory, we have to understand the different "selves" that make up our self-concept, which are the actual, ideal, and ought selves. The actual self consists of the attributes that you or someone else believes you *actually* possess. The ideal self consists of the attributes that you or someone else *would like you* to possess. The ought self consists of the attributes you or someone else believes you *should* possess.

These different selves can conflict with each other in various combinations. Discrepancies between the actual and ideal/ought selves can be motivating in some ways and prompt people to act for self-improvement.

For instance, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so. Discrepancies between the ideal and ought selves can be especially stressful. Another example is the dilemma of many working parents who may hold an ideal view of self that encompasses professional success and career advancement, while also feeling a sense of duty and obligation to be actively involved in their children's lives.

The actual self may reflect someone who strives to balance work commitments with family time but may feel they fall short of meeting the expectations of either the professional or parental ideal. These discrepancies can lead to emotional challenges, shifts in behavior, and changes in communication patterns as parents navigate the complexities of balancing work responsibilities with spending quality time with their children.

When we compare the actual self to the expectations of ourselves and others, we can see particular patterns of emotional and behavioral effects. When our actual self doesn't match up with our own ideals of self, we are not obtaining our own desires and hopes, which can lead to feelings of dejection, including disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration. For example, if your ideal self has no credit card debt and your actual self does, you may be frustrated with your lack of financial discipline and be motivated to stick to your budget and pay off your credit card bills.

When our actual self doesn't match up with other people's ideals for us, we may not be obtaining significant others' desires and hopes, which can lead to feelings of dejection, including shame, embarrassment, and concern for losing the affection or approval of others. For example, if a significant other sees you as an "A" student and you get a 2.8 GPA your first year of college, then you may be embarrassed to share your grades with that person.

When our actual self doesn't match up with what we think other people think we should obtain, we are not living up to the ought self that we think others have constructed for us, which can lead to feelings of agitation, feeling threatened, and fearing potential punishment. For example, if your parents think you should follow in their footsteps and take over the family business, but your actual self wants to go into the military, then you may be unsure of what to do and fear being isolated from the family.

Finally, when our actual self doesn't match up with what we think we should obtain, we are not meeting what we see as our duties or obligations, which can lead to feelings of agitation, including guilt, weakness, and a feeling that we have fallen short of our moral standard (Higgins, 1987). For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so due to the guilt of reading about the increasing number of animals being housed at the facility.

Think About This 2.2.1 Am I Who I Want to Be?

- **Actual vs. own ideals:** We have an overall feeling that we are not obtaining our desires and hopes, which leads to feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration.
- **Actual vs. others' ideals:** We have an overall feeling that we are not obtaining significant others' desires and hopes for us, which leads to feelings of shame and embarrassment.
- **Actual vs. others' ought:** We have an overall feeling that we are not meeting what others see as our duties and obligations, which leads to feelings of agitation, including fear of potential punishment.
- **Actual vs. own ought:** We have an overall feeling that we are not meeting our duties and obligations, which can lead to a feeling that we have fallen short of our own moral standards.

Influences on Self-Perception

We have already learned that other people influence our self-concept and self-esteem. While interactions we have with individuals and groups are definitely important to consider, we must also note the influence that larger, more systemic forces have on our self-perception. Social and family influences, culture, and the media all play a role in shaping who we think we are and how we feel about ourselves. Although these are powerful socializing forces, there are ways to maintain some control over our self-perception.

Social and Family Influences

Various forces help socialize us into our respective social and cultural groups and play a powerful role in presenting us with options about who we can be. While we may like to think that our self-perception starts with a blank canvas, our perceptions are limited by our experiences and various social and cultural contexts.

Parents and peers shape our self-perceptions in positive and negative ways. Feedback that we get from significant others, which includes close family, can lead to positive views of self (Hargie, 2011). In the past few years, however, there has been a public discussion and debate about how much positive reinforcement people should give to others, especially children. The following questions have been raised: Do we have current and upcoming generations that have been overpraised? Is the praise given warranted? What are the positive and negative effects of praise? What is the end goal of the praise? Let's briefly look at this discussion and its connection to self-perception.

Whether praise is warranted or not is very subjective and specific to each person and context, but in general, there have been questions raised about the potential negative effects of too much praise. **Motivation** is the underlying force that drives us to do things. Sometimes we are intrinsically motivated, meaning we want to do something for the love of doing it or the resulting internal satisfaction. Other times, we are extrinsically motivated, meaning we do something to receive a reward or avoid punishment.

If you put effort into completing a short documentary for a class because you love filmmaking and editing, you have been largely motivated by intrinsic forces. If you complete the documentary because you want an "A" and know that if you fail, your parents will not give you money for your spring break trip, then you are motivated by extrinsic factors. Both can, of course, effectively motivate us. Praise is a form of extrinsic reward, and if there is an actual reward associated with the praise, like money or special recognition, some people speculate that intrinsic motivation will suffer. But what's so good about intrinsic motivation? Intrinsic motivation is more substantial and long-lasting than extrinsic motivation and can lead to the development of a work ethic and sense of pride in one's abilities. Intrinsic motivation can move people to accomplish great things over long periods of time and be happy despite the effort and sacrifices made. Extrinsic motivation dies when the reward stops.

Additionally, too much praise can lead people to have a misguided sense of their abilities. College professors who are reluctant to fail students who produce failing work may be setting those students up to be shocked when their supervisor critiques their abilities or output once they get into a professional context (Hargie, 2011).

In some cultures, praise is seen as an esteem booster with no downsides. In other cultures, praise is seen as encouraging children to become arrogant and individualistic, a detriment in a collectivistic culture. In these cultures that value collectivism, interdependence is taught and valued. For example, teachers give less positive reinforcement in Japanese and Taiwanese classrooms than do teachers in US classrooms. Chinese and Kenyan parents do not regularly praise their children because they fear it may make them too individualistic, rude, or arrogant (Wierzbicka, 2004). So the phenomenon of overpraising isn't universal, and the debate over its potential effects is not resolved.

Research has also found that communication patterns develop between parents and children that are common to many verbally and physically abusive relationships. Such patterns have negative effects on a child's self-efficacy and self-esteem (Morgan & Wilson, 2007). As you'll recall from our earlier discussion, attributions are links we make to identify the cause of a behavior. In the case of aggressive or abusive parents, they are not as able to distinguish between mistakes and intentional behaviors, often seeing honest mistakes as intended and reacting negatively to the child. Such parents also communicate generally negative evaluations to their child by saying, for example, "You can't do anything right!" or "You're a bad girl." When children do exhibit positive behaviors, abusive parents are more likely to use external attributions that diminish the achievement of the child by saying, for example, "You only won because the other team was off their game." In general, abusive parents have unpredictable reactions to their children's positive and negative behavior, which creates an uncertain and often scary climate for a child that can lead to lower self-esteem and erratic or aggressive behavior. The cycles of praise and blame are just two examples of how the family as a socializing force can influence our self-perceptions. Culture also influences how we see ourselves.

Culture

How people perceive themselves varies across cultures. For example, many cultures exhibit a phenomenon known as the **self-enhancement bias**, meaning that we tend to emphasize our desirable qualities relative to other people (Loughnan et al., 2011). But the degree to which people engage in self-enhancement varies. A review of many studies in this area found that people in Western countries, such as the United States, were significantly more likely to self-enhance than people in countries such as Japan. Many scholars explain this variation using a common measure of cultural variation that claims people in individualistic cultures are more likely to engage in competition and openly praise accomplishments than people in collectivistic cultures. The difference in self-enhancement has also been tied to economics, with scholars arguing that people in countries with greater income inequality are more likely to view themselves as superior to others or want to be perceived as superior to others (even if they don't have economic wealth) to conform to the country's values and norms. This holds true because countries with high levels of economic inequality, like the United States, typically value competition and the right to boast about winning or succeeding, while countries with more economic equality, like Japan, have a cultural norm of modesty (Loughnan et al., 2011).

Race has also historically played a role in self-perception. For example, positive self-esteem and self-efficacy tend to be higher in African American adolescent girls than in Caucasian girls (Stockton et al., 2009). However, self-perception becomes more complex when we consider multi-racial individuals. Some multi-racial people experience more identity challenges, are more racially aware, and report lower self-esteem (Atkins et al., 2023). Of course, there are many variables in the development of a person's self-esteem, so this assessment cannot be made of all multi-racial individuals.

There are some general differences in gender and self-perception that relate to self-concept, self-efficacy, and the envisioning of ideal selves. As with any cultural differences, these are generalizations that have been supported by research, but they do not represent all individuals within a group. As was noted earlier, gender differences are interesting to study but are very often exaggerated beyond the actual variations. Socialization and internalization of societal norms for gender differences account for much more of our perceived differences than do innate or natural differences between genders. These gender norms may be explicitly stated—for example, a mother may say to her son, "Boys don't play with dolls"—or they may be more implicit, with girls being encouraged to pursue historically feminine professions like teaching or nursing without others actually stating the expectation.

Media

The representations we see in the media affect our self-perception. The vast majority of media images include idealized representations of attractiveness. Despite the fact that the images of people we see in ads and in entertainment are not typically what we see when we look at the people around us in a classroom, at work, or at the grocery store, many of us continue to hold ourselves to an unrealistic standard of beauty and attractiveness. Movies, magazines, and television shows are filled with beautiful people, and less attractive actors, when they are present in the media, are typically portrayed as the butt of jokes, villains, or only as background extras (Patzer, 2008). Advertising in particular encourages people to engage in social comparison, regularly communicating to us that we are inferior because we lack a certain product or that we need to change some aspect of our lives to keep up with and be similar to others.

Take a look at any magazine, television show, or movie, and you will most likely see very beautiful people. When you look around you in your daily life, there are likely not as many glamorous and gorgeous people. Scholars and media critics have critiqued this discrepancy for decades because it has contributed to many social issues and public health issues, ranging from body dysmorphic disorder to eating disorders to lowered self-esteem.

Much of the media is driven by advertising, and the business of media has been to perpetuate a "culture of lack" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). This means that we are constantly told, via mediated images, that we lack something. In short, advertisements often tell us we don't have enough money, enough beauty, or enough material possessions. Over the past few decades, women's bodies in the media have become smaller and thinner, while men's bodies have become larger and more muscular. At the same time, the US population has become dramatically more obese. As research shows that men and women are becoming more and more dissatisfied with their bodies, which ultimately affects their self-concept and self-esteem, health and beauty product lines proliferate. Cosmetic surgeries and other types of enhancements are becoming more and more popular. From young children to older adults, people are becoming more aware of and oftentimes unhappy with their bodies, which results in a variety of self-perception problems.

1. How do you think the media influences your self-perception and body image?
2. Describe the typical man that is portrayed in the media. Describe the typical woman who is portrayed in the media. What impressions do these typical bodies make on others? What are the potential positive and negative effects of the way the media portrays the human body?
3. Find an example of an "atypical" body represented in the media (a magazine, TV show, or movie). Is this person presented in a positive, negative, or neutral way? Why do you think this person was chosen?

Self-Presentation

How we perceive ourselves manifests in how we present ourselves to others. **Self-presentation** is the process of strategically concealing or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions (Human et al., 2011). We engage in this process daily and for different reasons. Although people sometimes intentionally deceive others in the process of self-presentation, in general, we try to make a good impression while still remaining authentic. Since self-presentation helps meet our instrumental, relational, and identity needs, we stand to lose quite a bit if we are caught intentionally misrepresenting ourselves. In May of 2012, Yahoo!'s CEO resigned after it became known that he stated on official documents that he had two college degrees when he actually only had one. In a similar incident, a woman who had long served as the dean of admissions for the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology was dismissed from her position after it was learned that she had only attended one year of college and had falsely indicated she had a bachelor's and master's degree (Webber & Korn, 2012).

Such incidents clearly show that although people can get away with such false self-presentation for a while, the eventual consequences of being found out are dire. As communicators, we sometimes engage in more subtle forms of inauthentic self-presentation. For example, a person may state or imply that they know more about a subject or situation than they actually do in order to seem smart or "in the loop." During a speech, a speaker works on a polished and competent delivery to distract from a lack of substantive content. These cases of strategic self-presentation may not ever be found out, but communicators should still avoid them as they do not live up to the standards of ethical communication.

Consciously and competently engaging in self-presentation can have benefits because we can provide others with a more positive and accurate picture of who we are. People who are skilled at impression management are typically more engaging and confident, which allows others to pick up on more cues from which to form impressions (Human et al., 2011). Being a skilled self-presenter draws on many of the practices used by competent communicators, including higher self-monitoring. When self-presentation skills and self-monitoring skills combine, communicators can simultaneously monitor their own expressions, the reaction of others, and the situational and social context (Sosik et al., 2002). Sometimes people get help with their self-presentation. Although most people can't afford or wouldn't think of hiring an image consultant, some people have started generously donating their self-presentation expertise to help others. Many people who have been riding the tough job market for a year or more get discouraged and may consider giving up on their job search. So getting this help with their self-presentation during the job interview process can make a lot of difference.

There are two main types of self-presentation: prosocial and self-serving (Sosik et al., 2002). Prosocial self-presentation entails behaviors that present a person as a role model and make a person more likable and attractive. For example, a supervisor may call on her employees to uphold high standards for business ethics, model that behavior in her own actions, and compliment others when they exemplify those standards. Self-serving self-presentation entails behaviors that present a person as highly skilled, willing to challenge others, and someone not to be messed with. For instance, a supervisor may publicly take credit for the accomplishments of others or publicly critique an employee who failed to meet a particular standard. In summary, prosocial strategies are aimed at benefiting others, while self-serving strategies benefit the self at the expense of others.

In general, we strive to present a public image that matches up with our self-concept, but we can also use self-presentation strategies to enhance our self-concept (Hargie, 2011). When we present ourselves in order to evoke a positive evaluative response, we are engaging in self-enhancement. In the pursuit of self-enhancement, a person might try to be as appealing as possible

in a particular area or with a particular person to gain feedback that will enhance one's self-esteem. For example, a singer might train and practice for weeks before singing in front of a well-respected vocal coach but not invest as much effort in preparing to sing in front of friends. Although positive feedback from friends is beneficial, positive feedback from an experienced singer could enhance a person's self-concept. Self-enhancement can be productive and achieved competently, or it can be used inappropriately. Using self-enhancement behaviors just to gain the approval of others or out of self-centeredness may lead people to communicate in ways that are perceived as phony or overbearing and end up making an unfavorable impression (Sosik et al., 2002).

Although social networking has long been a way to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, the advent of social media has made the process of making connections and those all-important first impressions much more complex. Just looking at Facebook as an example, we can clearly see that the very acts of constructing a profile, posting status updates, "liking" certain things, and sharing various information via Facebook features and apps are self-presentation (Kim & Lee, 2011). People also form impressions based on the number of friends we have and the photos and posts that other people tag us in. All this information floating around can be difficult to manage. So how do we manage the impressions we make digitally, given that there is a permanent record?

Research shows that people overall engage in positive and honest self-presentation on Facebook (Kim & Lee, 2011). Since people know how visible the information they post is, they may choose to only reveal things they think will form favorable impressions. But the mediated nature of any social media platform also leads some people to disclose more personal information than they might otherwise in such a public or semipublic forum. These hyperpersonal disclosures, such as sharing political views or opinions on controversial social issues, run the risk of forming negative impressions based on who sees them. In general, the ease of digital communication has presented new challenges for our self-control and information management. The demands for ways to enable us to stay connected, but at the same time protect privacy and our identity, are always there. We all now leave digital trails of information that can be useful in terms of our self-presentation. Still, we can also create new challenges in terms of managing the information floating around, from which others may form impressions of us.

The widespread use of social media today offers individuals another way to share personal information, offering both advantages and drawbacks. While users freely disclose lifestyle choices, political opinions, and personal images, concerns about privacy arise due to the public nature of these platforms. Despite the focus on managing online privacy, instances of self-disclosure mishaps persist, underscoring the necessity of a balanced approach to self-disclosure in the digital era. A significant challenge is the blurred boundary between private and public personas, particularly for digital natives raised in the social media era. The problems stemming from self-disclosure on social media touch all parts of our society.

Example 2.2.2 Poor Digital Literacy: Paying the Price

A young professional expressing a controversial viewpoint online may face backlash from colleagues and potential career repercussions. A child sharing their location on social media could jeopardize their safety, highlighting the risks of oversharing personal information online. Or an elderly individual unknowingly divulging sensitive financial information on social media may become a target for scams or identity theft. These examples underscore the importance of understanding the potential pitfalls of self-disclosure on social media and the need to enhance digital literacy across all age groups.

1. What impressions do you want people to form of you based on the information they can see on your social media?
2. Have you ever used social media or the Internet to do "research" on a person? What things would you find favorable and unfavorable?
3. Do you have any guidelines you follow regarding what information about yourself you will put online or not? If so, what are they? If not, why?

Key Takeaways

- Our self-concept is the overall idea of who we think we are. It is developed through our interactions with others and through social comparison, which allows us to compare our beliefs and behaviors to those of others.
- Our self-esteem is based on the evaluations and judgments we make about various characteristics of our self-concept. It is developed through an assessment and evaluation of our various skills and abilities, known as self-efficacy, and through a comparison and evaluation of who we are, who we would like to be, and who we should be (self-discrepancy theory).
- Social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory affect our self-concept and self-esteem because, through comparison with others and comparison of our actual, ideal, and ought selves, we make judgments about who we are and our self-worth. These judgments then affect how we communicate and behave.

- Socializing forces like family, culture, and media affect our self-perception because they give us feedback on who we are. This feedback can be evaluated positively or negatively and can lead to positive or negative patterns that influence our self-perception and then our communication.
- Self-presentation refers to the process of strategically concealing and/or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions. Prosocial self-presentation is intended to benefit others, and self-serving self-presentation is intended to benefit the self at the expense of others. People also engage in self-enhancement, which is a self-presentation strategy by which people intentionally seek out positive evaluations.

Attributions

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2.3: Perceiving Others

Making an Impression

Are you a good judge of character? How quickly can you "size someone up?" Interestingly, research shows that many people are surprisingly accurate at predicting how an interaction with someone will unfold based on initial impressions. Fascinating research has also been done on the ability of people to make a judgment about a person's competence after as little as 100 milliseconds of exposure to politicians' faces. Even more surprising is that people's judgments of competence, after exposure to two candidates for Senate elections, accurately predicted election outcomes (Ballew II & Todorov, 2007). In short, after only minimal exposure to a candidate's facial expressions, people made judgments about the person's competence, and those candidates judged as more competent were the people who actually won elections! As you read this section, keep in mind that these principles apply to how you perceive others and to how others perceive you. Just as others make impressions on us, we make impressions on others. We have already learned how the perception process works in terms of selecting, organizing, and interpreting. In this section, we will focus on how we perceive others, with specific attention to how we interpret our perceptions of others.

Attribution and Interpretation

I'm sure you have a family member, friend, or coworker with whom you have ideological or political differences. When conversations and inevitable disagreements occur, you may view this person as being deliberately antagonistic. If you are invested in the issue being debated, you may view the person as "on their soapbox" if you aren't invested. In either case, your existing perceptions of the other person are probably reinforced after your conversation, and you may leave the conversation thinking, "They are never going to wake up and see how ignorant they are! I don't know why I even bother trying to talk to them!" Similar situations occur regularly, and there are some key psychological processes that play into how we perceive others' behaviors. By examining these processes, attribution in particular, we can see how our communication with others is affected by the explanations we create for others' behavior. In addition, we will learn some common errors that we make in the attribution process that regularly lead to conflict and misunderstanding.

Attribution

In most interactions, we are constantly running an **attribution** script in our minds, which essentially tries to come up with explanations for what is happening. Why did my neighbor slam the door when she saw me walking down the hall? Why is my partner being extra nice to me today? Why did my office mate miss our project team meeting this morning? In general, we seek to attribute the cause of others' behaviors to internal or external factors. Internal attributions connect the cause of behaviors to personal aspects such as personality traits. External attributions connect the cause of behaviors to situational factors. Attributions are important to consider because our reactions to others' behaviors are strongly influenced by the explanations we reach.

Example 2.3.1 Reading the Actions of Others

Imagine that Emma and Arthur are dating. One day, Arthur gets frustrated and raises his voice to Emma. She may find that behavior offensive and even consider breaking up with him if she attributes the cause of the blow-up to his personality, since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change. Conversely, Emma may be more forgiving if she attributes the cause of his behavior to situational factors beyond Arthur's control, since external factors are usually temporary. If she makes an internal attribution, Emma may think, "Wow, this person is really a loose cannon. Who knows when he will lose it again?" If she makes an external attribution, she may think, "Arthur has been under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines at work and hasn't been getting much sleep. Once this project is over, I'm sure he'll be more relaxed."

This process of attribution is ongoing, and, as with many aspects of perception, we are sometimes aware of the attributions we make, and sometimes they are automatic and/or unconscious. Attribution has received much scholarly attention because it is in this part of the perception process that some of the most common perceptual errors or biases occur.

One of the most common perceptual errors is the fundamental attribution error, which refers to our tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions (Sillars, 1980).

Example 2.3.2 Whose Fault Is It?

Say someone drives into the city for a fun day with friends, with difficulty finds a 2-hour parking spot, and decides to take it even though the group is planning to be gone longer than 2 hours. The driver comes back to their car later in the day and sees a parking ticket because they overstayed the time allotted for that space. The driver could blame themselves for poor time management for not getting back to the car in time, or just chalk it up to what sometimes happens when we lose track of time. But the driver is committing the fundamental attribution error if they complain that the only reason they got the ticket is that the city had found an easy way to make money. And further protest that the officer was busy giving out tickets rather than doing their real job of catching criminals. Someone making this perceptual error is less likely to acknowledge that the officer was just doing their job, and it was the driver's fault for not keeping track of the time.

Perceptual errors can also be biased, and in the case of the self-serving bias, the error works out in our favor. Just as we tend to attribute others' behaviors to internal rather than external causes, we do the same for ourselves, especially when our behaviors have led to something successful or positive. When our behaviors lead to failure or something negative, we tend to attribute the cause to external factors. Thus, the self-serving bias is a perceptual error through which we attribute the cause of our successes to internal personal factors while attributing our failures to external factors beyond our control. When we look at the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias together, we can see that we are likely to judge ourselves more favorably than another person, or at least less personally.

The professor-student relationship offers a good case example of how these concepts can play out. Students who earned an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment may attribute that grade to the strictness, unfairness, or incompetence of their professor. Or professors may attribute a poor grade to the student's laziness, attitude, or intelligence. In both cases, the behavior is explained using an internal attribution and is an example of the fundamental attribution error. Students may further attribute their poor grade to their busy schedule or other external, situational factors rather than their lack of motivation, interest, or preparation (internal attributions). On the other hand, when students get a good grade on a paper, they will likely attribute that cause to their intelligence or hard work rather than an easy assignment or an "easy grading" professor.

Both of these examples illustrate the self-serving bias. These psychological processes have implications for our communication because when we attribute causality to another person's personality, we tend to have a stronger emotional reaction and tend to assume that this personality characteristic is stable, which may lead us to avoid communication with the person or to react negatively. Now that you are aware of these common errors, you can monitor them more and engage in perception checking, which we will learn more about later, to verify your attributions.

Impressions and Interpretation

As we perceive others, we make impressions about their personality, likeability, attractiveness, and other characteristics. Although many of our impressions are personal, what forms them is sometimes based more on circumstances than personal characteristics. All the information we take in isn't treated equally. How important are first impressions? Does the last thing you notice about a person stick with you longer because it's more recent? Do we tend to remember the positive or negative things we notice about a person? This section will help answer these questions, as we explore how the timing of information and the content of the messages we receive can influence our perception.



Figure 2.3.1: Perception can significantly impact many situations, including a job interview. (Public Domain; Savannah River Site via Wikimedia Commons)

First and Last Impressions

The old saying "You never get a second chance to make a good impression" points to the fact that first impressions matter. The brain is a predictive organ in that it wants to know, based on previous experiences and patterns, what to expect next, and **first impressions** function to fill this need, allowing us to determine how we will proceed with an interaction after only a quick assessment of the person with whom we are interacting (Hargie, 2011). Research shows that people are surprisingly good at making accurate first impressions about how an interaction will unfold and at identifying personality characteristics of people they do not know. Studies show that people are generally able to predict how another person will behave toward them based on an initial interaction. A job interview, as shown in Figure 2.3.1, is an essential place for the interviewee to give a positive first impression. People's accuracy and ability to predict interaction based on first impressions vary, but people with high accuracy are typically socially skilled and popular and have less loneliness, anxiety, and depression; more satisfying relationships; and more senior positions and higher salaries (Hargie, 2011). So not only do first impressions matter, but having the ability to form accurate first impressions seems to correlate with many other positive characteristics.

First impressions are enduring because of the primacy effect, which leads us to place more value on the first information we receive about a person. So if we interpret the first information we receive from or about a person as positive, then a positive first impression will form and influence how we respond to that person as the interaction continues. Likewise, negative interpretations of information can lead us to form negative first impressions. If you sit down at a restaurant and servers walk by for several minutes and no one greets you, then you will likely interpret that negatively and not have a good impression of your server when he finally shows up. This may lead you to be short with the server, which may lead him to not be as attentive as he normally would. At this point, a series of negative interactions has set into motion a cycle that will be very difficult to reverse and make positive.

The recency effect leads us to put more weight on the most recent impression we have of a person's communication over earlier impressions. Even a positive first impression can be tarnished by a negative final impression.

Example 2.3.3 Last Impressions Matter

Imagine that a professor has maintained a relatively high level of credibility with you over the course of the semester. She made a good first impression by being organized, approachable, and interesting during the first days of class. The rest of the semester went fairly well with no major conflicts. However, during the last week of the term, she didn't have final papers graded and ready to turn back by the time she said she would, which left you with some uncertainty about how well you needed to do on the final exam to earn an A in the class. When you got your paper back on the last day of class, you saw that your grade was much lower than you expected. If this happened to you, what would you write on the instructor evaluation? Because of the recency effect, many students would likely give a disproportionate amount of value to the professor's actions

in the final week of the semester, negatively skewing the evaluation, which is supposed to be reflective of the entire semester. Even though the professor only returned one assignment late, that fact is very recent in students' minds and can overshadow the positive impression that formed many weeks earlier.

Physical and Environmental Influences on Perception

We make first impressions based on a variety of factors, including physical and environmental characteristics. In terms of physical characteristics, style of dress and grooming are important, especially in professional contexts. In fact, we see people wearing certain uniforms, such as police, military personnel, or doctors, as having authority simply because of how they are dressed. Think about the harm that has been done when people pose as police, soldiers, or doctors to commit crimes or other acts of malice. We also have a general schema regarding how to dress and groom for various situations, ranging from formal to business casual to casual to lounging around the house.

You would likely be able to offer some descriptors of how a person would look and act from the following categories: a life coach, tech entrepreneur, creative artist, and fashion influencer. The schema associated with these various cliques or styles is formed through personal experience and through exposure to media representations of these groups. Different professions also have a schema for appearance and dress. Imagine a doctor, mechanic, congressperson, chef, mail carrier, or soldier as shown in Figure 2.3.2. Each group has clothing and personal styles that create and fit into general patterns. Of course, the mental picture we have of any of the examples above is not representative of the whole group, meaning that stereotypical thinking often exists within our schema. We will learn more about the negative effects of stereotypical thinking later in the chapter, but it's important to understand how persuasive various physical perceptual influences can be.



Figure 2.3.2: This US Army crew chief in uniform standing next to a medical rescue helicopter influences our perception of him and the army. Alternative description of image. (Public Domain; Capt. Jordan Beagle via Wikimedia Commons)

Just as clothing and personal style help us form impressions of others, so do physical body features. The degree to which we perceive people to be attractive influences our attitudes about and communication with them. Facial attractiveness and body weight tend to be common features used in the perception of physical attractiveness. In general, people find symmetrical faces and non-overweight bodies attractive. People perceived as attractive are generally evaluated more positively and seen as kinder and more competent than people evaluated as less attractive. Additionally, people rated as attractive receive more eye contact, more smiles, and closer proximity to others (people stand closer to them). Unlike clothing and personal style, these physical features are more difficult, if not impossible, to change.

Finally, the material objects and people that surround a person influence our perception. Research supports the reliability of such impressions, as people have been shown to make reasonably accurate judgments about a person's personality after viewing their office or bedroom (Hargie, 2011). The link between environmental cues and perception is important enough for many companies to create policies about what can and cannot be displayed in personal office spaces. A subtle indicator of a hobby in a professional space is generally acceptable to most employers. But both employers and clients usually want a clear dividing line

between the personal and professional lives of the bank manager, attorney, or psychologist they are visiting. They don't want to see evidence of a fishing or cross-stitching hobby dominating the office space. For many, this influences customers' perceptions of the professional's personality and credibility. The arrangement of furniture also creates impressions. Walking into a meeting and sitting on one end of a long boardroom table is typically less inviting than sitting at a round table or on a sofa.

Although some physical and environmental features are easier to change than others, it is useful to become aware of how these factors, which aren't necessarily related to personality or verbal and nonverbal communication, shape our perceptions. These early impressions also affect how we interpret and perceive later encounters, which can be further explained through the halo and horn effects.

The Halo and Horn Effects

We have a tendency to adapt information that conflicts with our earlier impressions in order to make it fit within the frame we have established. This is known as **selective distortion**, and it manifests in the halo and horn effects. The angelic halo and devilish horns are useful metaphors for the lasting effects of positive and negative impressions.

The halo effect occurs when initial positive perceptions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The horn effect occurs when initial negative perceptions lead us to view later interactions as negative (Hargie, 2011). Since impressions are especially important when a person is navigating the job market, let's imagine how the horn and halo effects could play out for a recent college graduate looking to land her first real job.

Example 2.3.4 The Benefits and Pitfalls of Prejudging

Priya has recently graduated with her degree in communication studies and is looking to start her career as a corporate trainer. If one of Priya's professors has a relationship with an executive at an area business, his positive verbal recommendation will likely result in a halo effect for Priya. Since the executive thinks highly of his friend, the professor, and the professor thinks highly of Priya, then the executive will start his interaction with Priya with a positive impression and interpret her behaviors more positively than he would otherwise. The halo effect initiated by the professor's recommendation may even lead the executive to dismiss or overlook some negative behaviors. Let's say Priya arrives late for her interview. That negative impression may create a horn effect that carries through the interview. Even if Priya presents as competent and friendly, the negative first impression could lead the executive to minimize or ignore those positive characteristics, and the company may not hire her.

Culture, Personality, and Perception

Our cultural identities and our personalities affect our perceptions. Sometimes we are conscious of the effects, and sometimes we are not. In either case, we have a tendency to favor others who exhibit cultural or personality traits that match up with our own. This tendency is so strong that it often leads us to assume that people we like are more similar to us than they actually are. Knowing more about how these forces influence our perceptions can help us become more aware of and competent regarding the impressions we form of others.

Culture

Race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make. The schemata through which we interpret what we perceive are influenced by our cultural identities. As we are socialized into various cultural identities, we internalize beliefs, attitudes, and values shared by others in our **cultural group**. Schemata held by members of a cultural identity group have similarities, but schemata held by different cultural groups may vary greatly. Unless we are exposed to various cultural groups and learn how others perceive us and the world around them, we will likely have a narrow or naïve view of the world and assume that others see things the way we do. Exposing yourself to and experiencing cultural differences in perspective doesn't mean that you have to change your schema to match another cultural group's. Instead, it may offer you a chance to understand better why and how your schemata were constructed the way they were.

As we have learned, perception starts with information that comes in through our senses. How we perceive even basic sensory information is influenced by our culture.

The Cultural Filter

- **Sight:** People in different cultures "read" art in different ways, differing in terms of where they start to look at an image and the types of information they perceive and process.
- **Sound:** "Atonal" music in some Asian cultures is unpleasing; it is uncomfortable to people who aren't taught that these combinations of sounds are pleasing.
- **Touch:** In some cultures, it would be very offensive for a man to touch—even tap on the shoulder—a woman who isn't a relative.
- **Taste:** The heat that spicy ingredients like chili peppers add to a dish is essential in some cultures, whereas individuals from milder-tasting cultures may find them too intense.
- **Smell:** The scent of durian fruit, considered a delicacy in Southeast Asia, is often described as pungent and overpowering by individuals from Western cultures.

Personality

You are going for a new job. You did well in the interview, and now your prospective employer is checking out your references, including contacting your previous employer. While they may have questions about your skills related to the job description, they likely will ask your former employer other questions, too. Did you follow directions? Did you work well with others? Were you reliable? Did you finish what you started? These questions are basically asking what kind of coworker, person, and leader your past employer thinks you are. Why does a prospective employer do this? Because our personality, aside from our skill set, has a big influence on how we see ourselves and how we perceive and interact with others.

Personality traits are formed through underlying motivations and impulses. While personality traits are "underlying," they are fairly enduring once a person reaches adulthood. That is not to say that people's personalities do not change, but major changes in personality are not common unless they result from some form of trauma. Although personality scholars believe there are thousands of personalities, they all comprise some combination of the same few traits. Much research has been done on personality traits, and the "Big Five" that are most commonly discussed are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (McCrae, 2001). These five traits appear to be representative of personalities across cultures.

What Affects Behavior?

- **Extraversion:** Refers to a person's interest in interacting with others. People with high extraversion are sociable and often called "extroverts." People with low extraversion are less sociable and are often called "introverts."
- **Agreeableness:** Refers to a person's level of trustworthiness and friendliness. People with high agreeableness are cooperative and likable. People with low agreeableness are suspicious of others and sometimes aggressive, which makes it more difficult for people to find them pleasant to be around.
- **Conscientiousness:** Refers to a person's level of self-organization and motivation. People with high conscientiousness are methodical, motivated, and dependable. People with low conscientiousness are less focused, less careful, and less dependable.
- **Neuroticism:** Refers to a person's level of negative thoughts regarding themselves. People high in neuroticism are insecure and experience emotional distress and may be perceived as unstable. People low in neuroticism are more relaxed, have fewer emotional swings, and are perceived as more stable.
- **Openness:** Refers to a person's willingness to consider new ideas and perspectives. People high in openness are creative and are perceived as open-minded. People low in openness are more rigid and set in their thinking and are perceived as "set in their ways."

The concept of assumed similarity refers to our tendency to perceive others as similar to us. When we don't have enough information about a person to know their key personality traits, we fill in the gaps, usually assuming they possess traits similar to those we see in ourselves. We also tend to assume that people have similar attitudes, or likes and dislikes, as we do. If you set your friend up with someone you think they'll really like, only to find out there was no chemistry when they met, you may be surprised to realize your friend doesn't have the same taste as you. Even though we may assume more trait and taste similarity between our significant others and ourselves than there actually is, research generally finds that while people do interpersonally group based on many characteristics, including race, class, and intelligence, the findings don't show that people with similar personalities group together (Beer & Watson, 2008).

In summary, personality affects our perception, and we all tend to be amateur personality scholars, given the amount of effort we put into assuming and evaluating others' personality traits. This bank of knowledge we accumulate based on previous interactions with people is used to help us predict how interactions will unfold and help us manage our interpersonal relationships. When we size up a person based on their personality, we are auditioning or interviewing them to see if we think there is compatibility. We use these implicit personality theories to generalize a person's overall personality from the traits we can perceive. The theories are "implicit" because they are not of academic but of experience-based origin, and the information we use to theorize about people's personalities isn't explicitly known or observed but implied. In other words, we use previous experience to guess other people's personality traits. We then assume more about a person based on the personality traits we assign to them.

This process of assuming has its advantages and drawbacks. In terms of advantages, the use of implicit personality theories offers us a perceptual shortcut that can be useful when we first meet someone. Our assessment of their traits and subsequent assumptions about who they are as a person make us feel like we "know the person," which reduces uncertainty and facilitates further interaction. In terms of drawbacks, our experience-based assumptions aren't always correct, but they are still persuasive and enduring. As we have already learned, first impressions carry a lot of weight in terms of how they influence further interaction. Positive and negative impressions formed early can also lead to a halo effect or a horn effect, which we discussed earlier. Personality-based impressions can also connect to impressions based on physical and environmental cues to make them even stronger. For example, perceiving another person as attractive can create a halo effect that then leads you to look for behavioral cues that you can then tie to positive personality traits. You may notice that the attractive person also says "please" and "thank you," which increases their likability. You may notice that the person has clean and fashionable shoes, which leads you to believe they are professional and competent, but also stylish. Now you have an overall positive impression of this person that will affect your subsequent behaviors (Beer & Watson, 2008). But how accurate were your impressions? If, on your way home, you realize you just bought a car from this person, who happened to be a car salesperson, that was significantly over your price range, you might have second thoughts about how good a person they actually are.

Key Takeaways

- We use attributions to interpret perceptual information, specifically, people's behavior. Internal attributions connect behavior to internal characteristics such as personality traits. External attributions connect behavior to external characteristics such as situational factors.
- Two common perceptual errors that occur in the process of attribution are the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias.
- First and last impressions are powerful forces in the perception process. The primacy effect is a perceptual tendency to place more importance on initial impressions than later impressions. The recency effect is the perceptual tendency to place more importance on the most recent impressions over earlier impressions.
- Cultural identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make about basic sensory information, such as sounds and smells.
- Personality affects perception in many ways. Our personality traits, which are our underlying and enduring motivations for thinking and behaving the way we do, affect how we see others and ourselves. We use observed and implied personality traits to form impressions of others, which then influence how we act toward them.

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2.4: Self-Disclosure's impact on perception

Deciding What to Share

Self-disclosure is the process of voluntarily revealing information about yourself to another person, not already known by them. The process of self-disclosure entails making various decisions, such as what type of information to disclose, assessing the situation and potential risks, and determining when, where, and how to disclose. These decisions play a crucial role in shaping our relationships and communication dynamics.

Think about the last time that you messaged someone on a dating site, or perhaps the last time you were talking with a new person you met in a class, or even at an event, or maybe at work? When we engage with other people and share information about ourselves, we are self-disclosing.

Self-Disclosure, Social Media, Identity, and Online Dating

Social platforms are undoubtedly prevalent in the world of online social networking. Many users self-disclose personal information on these sites, ranging from moods to religious affiliation, relationship status, style, food, travel, and personal contact information. Social platforms offer convenient opportunities to stay in touch with friends, family, classmates, and coworkers. We also have apps designed for dating and meeting potential romantic partners. These dating services and apps were created to bring people together.

Social media and self-disclosure create a dialectic tension between openness and closedness of one's self. What do you share about yourself online, and what don't you share? What aspects of your identity do you put on your profile, and what aspects of your identity do you hide or not place at the forefront? It's interesting and quite eye-opening when we take a step back to look at what we self-disclose about ourselves online.

Reflection Questions

- What do you self-disclose online? What do you usually disclose in your biography or profile summary section of the dating apps or services you're on?
- Based on your online identity and profile, are you comfortable disclosing your age, religious affiliations, ability, lifestyle choices, and other aspects of your identity?
- What aspects of your identity and culture do you freely disclose online? What aspects of your identity are you more likely to protect or delay disclosing?
- Do you target certain apps based on your identity and culture?

Johari Window

The Johari Window can help us examine self-disclosure in relationships. This model examines what information we have about ourselves, as well as the information others know about us (an accessible text description is linked in the figure caption). Based on the combination of our self-knowledge and others' knowledge about us, there are four types of selves: Open Self, Closed Self, Blind Self, and Unknown Self (Luft & Ingham, 1961). The Johari Window is typically drawn as a square divided into four equal quadrants. The horizontal line (x-axis) across the top is labeled "Known to Self" on the left and "Not Known to Self" on the right. The vertical line (y-axis) down the left side is labeled "Known to Others" at the top and "Not Known to Others" at the bottom, which creates the four quadrants:

Top Left (Known to Self / Known to Others): The Open Self
Top Right (Not Known to Self / Known to Others): The Blind Self
Bottom Left (Known to Self / Not Known to Others): The Closed Self
Bottom Right (Not Known to Self / Not Known to Others): The Unknown Self

The x-axis of the Johari Window represents information about the self that is either known or not known to the self, while the y-axis represents information that is either known or not known to others. Together, these axes create four quadrants that illustrate

different dimensions of self-awareness and perception.

Let's briefly look at each quadrant. The *Open Self* is the quadrant that includes information known to both the self and others, such as a person openly identifying as an extrovert. The *Blind Self* represents what is unknown to the self but known to others, such as a nervous habit like tapping a foot that others notice but the person does not. The *Unknown Self* consists of information that is hidden from both the self and others, such as an undiscovered talent for painting that has never been attempted. Finally, the *Closed Self* (also sometimes called the Hidden Self as shown in Figure 2.4.1) represents what is known to the individual but not shared with others, such as keeping personal fears or insecurities private. Depending on the individual, each window can be bigger or smaller than the other. And the relative size of each quadrant can change over a person's life. For example, asking for and really listening to feedback from family, friends, and co-workers can shrink the *Blind Self*. By looking at self-disclosure through the Johari Window filter, we can better understand the role that self-disclosure plays in our self-awareness, personal growth, and relationships. Now let's examine each of the quadrants in more depth.

	Known to Self	**Not Known to Self**
Known to Others	Arena "Open Self"	Blindspot "Blind Self"
Not Known to Others	Facade "Hidden Self"	Unknown Self

Figure 2.4.1: This Johari Window model helps us understand ourselves and others. Alternative description of image. (SA 4.0; Spaynton via Wikimedia Commons)

Open Self

The **Open Self** represents the parts of ourselves we know well, and that we choose to share or self-disclose to others. This typically includes items like our name, hobbies, likes, and dislikes. The amount of information that is openly known to others varies, based on the relationship. Imagine you are on a first date. You have just met this person. What information about yourself are you willing to share? As we get to know someone, we tend to self-disclose more information. As we self-disclose more information, the size of our Open Self increases. Each person gets to choose the size of their Open Self, and this can be different in distinct relationships.

Example 2.4.1 Are You an Open Book?

Nicholas enjoys sharing his passion for photography with his friends and social media followers. He openly discusses his favorite photography techniques, camera gear, and recent photo shoots. Nicholas also shares details about his favorite travel destinations, such as hiking in national parks and exploring new cities. This is an example of the Open Self because this information is willingly shared by Nicholas to connect with others who share similar interests and to express his authentic self in social interactions.

Closed Self

The **Closed Self** (also sometimes called the Hidden Self) represents the parts of ourselves we know well, but that we choose to keep secret or not tell others. With someone we know well and trust, we tend to have a larger Open Self and a smaller Closed Self.

Example 2.4.2 To Share or Not to Share

Let's say Isabella has known her girlfriend Emily for three years. They get along well, have high trust in their relationship, and also live together. In this situation, Isabella is likely to self-disclose more freely with Emily, and due to this, her Closed Self would be smaller. However, Isabella shares only surface information with her colleagues at work. In her work relationships, Isabella's Closed Self is much larger.

We keep information about ourselves from others in order to protect ourselves. For example, when Isabella gets a phone call from someone trying to sell her a magazine subscription, she would be hesitant to provide information about herself other than her name. When a salesperson asks Isabella to talk about how many magazines she subscribes to, she may or may not provide this information. If she chooses not to self-disclose, Isabella keeps this part of herself within the Closed Self.

The size of the Open Self is directly proportional to the size of the Closed Self. In other words, people with a large Open Self have a small Closed Self. Individuals with a large Hidden or Closed Self have a small Open Self.

Blind Self

The **Blind Self** may be the most interesting quadrant on the Johari Window. The Blind Self represents the parts of ourselves that other people know well, yet we are unaware of this information about ourselves. How can this happen?

Example 2.4.3 Blind Spot

Imagine that Antony has a check-in meeting with his supervisor. In this meeting, Elena (Antony's supervisor) praises him for his work ethic. Antony says, "Thank you, I value your opinion." In the next sentence, however, Elena states, "that is why I need to talk with you about lowering your voice in the office. It has come to my attention that when you speak on the phone at your desk, everyone else in the office can hear everything you say. It has become an issue for other employees, who also need to make phone calls and perform in a relatively quiet environment." Antony is shocked. No one in the office, up until this point, has said anything to him about his loud voice, yet it seems many people know this about him. In this example, Antony's loud voice had been part of his Blind Self until his supervisor brought it up. He is unaware that his voice is so loud that it disrupts other people's work in his office space.

Information may be part of our Blind Selves when others are reluctant to share this information with us. Perhaps others are afraid to share this information because they do not want to damage the relationship, or they believe they will hurt the other person's feelings. Information may also be part of the Blind Self due to a person's ineffective listening skills or low self-monitoring. Perhaps other people have asked Antony to lower his voice or used nonverbal communication to indicate to him that he should quiet down. For some reason, Antony never got the message until today. Once Antony finds out this piece of information about himself, it is no longer part of his Blind Self. Now it is part of his Open Self, since the information is known both by others and himself.

Unknown Self

The **Unknown Self** represents the parts of ourselves that no one knows. It is difficult to think about what the Unknown Self may include, since neither we nor others are aware of this information. Sometimes this information is buried deep in our subconscious, due to trauma or because there was an event that happened when we were young, and we cannot remember.

Example 2.4.4 Puzzling Reaction

For example, when Cho was less than 2 years old, his family was awakened in the middle of the night by a fire alarm. Cho's parents grabbed them from bed, rushed them out of the house, and had to stand outside in below-freezing temperatures until the fire department could put out a small fire in the garage. Although Cho has no memory of this incident, any time they hear a fire or car alarm or smell smoke, their heart races, their blood pressure increases, and they get very emotionally upset. Without a memory of this event, Cho cannot explain this strong reaction to alarms or the smell of smoke. That part of themselves would be considered the Unknown Self.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

The second theory we will discuss as we explore self-disclosure is the **Uncertainty Reduction Theory** (**URT**). URT helps us to understand why we initiate communication with people, as well as why we continue to build and maintain relationships with them. Uncertainty reduction theory states that we pursue knowledge about others in order to reduce or resolve anxiety associated with the unknown.

Passive, Active, and Interactive Strategies

According to URT, humans use three basic strategies: passive, active, and interactive, to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability and the feeling of safety when interacting with others.

Let's start with an example: Keisha saw a photo of Jacob on a dating app, and she is interested in him. Let's look at how the three strategies of URT might help Keisha to feel safe moving forward with getting to know this potential romantic partner. Consider what you would do in Keisha's situation.

Think About This 2.4.1 Developing a Relationship

The **passive strategy** refers to observing someone from afar, sort of like being a fly on the wall. In this case, Keisha did a Google search on Jacob before moving forward with requesting a date. The Google search revealed that Jacob worked at a local nonprofit organization. This information encouraged Keisha to move forward with the active strategy.

The **active strategy** involves getting information about the person from another source, generally a friend, family member, or co-worker. Keisha has a friend who works at the same nonprofit as Jacob, so she was able to ask this person questions about Jacob's interests and personality.

Finally, the **interactive strategy** focuses on a direct exchange of information with the other person. After using the passive and active strategies to find out more information about Jacob, Keisha messaged Jacob directly and engaged in a conversation with mutual self-disclosure. The interactive strategy allows for the most in-depth and direct exchange of information.

Thus, Keisha used all three strategies to gain information about Jacob. These three strategies help us not only to reduce uncertainty about others but also to more accurately predict future behavior.

Why understand these concepts? By learning about the Johari Window, we can become more self-aware and better understand our interactions with others. And we can use this tool to reflect on how others may see our behavior and intentions. We can also consider our identity management. In other words, are we satisfied with what others know and believe about us? In addition to the interactions and relationships between ourselves and another person, we can consider the benefits of using the Johari Window in group situations. As a project leader, it's important at the outset to be aware of the amount of knowledge various team members have about the project. As the project progresses, consider and decide what processes and obstacles are relevant for team members to know and what information is best known only to the team lead (Kyalnes, 2023). The Johari Window can help us heighten our awareness of these issues and, if necessary, take action to create a more effective dynamic amongst team members. Understanding the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) and its strategies (passive, active, and interactive) helps individuals reduce uncertainty, enhance predictability, and feel safer in interactions. By applying these strategies, as Keisha did in getting to know Jacob, individuals can navigate relationships more effectively, build trust, and make informed decisions based on reduced uncertainty.

Key Takeaways

- The Johari Window is a useful tool for understanding how we disclose to others and to determine if we want to change the size of our "open self."
- There are four parts to the Johari Window:
  - Open Self: Known parts shared with others, self-disclosure varies with relationships, increases with more disclosure, reflects authentic self
  - Closed Self: Known but kept secret, size varies with trust levels, protects oneself, inversely related to Open Self size.

    - Blind Self: Others know, the individual is unaware, revealed through feedback, reluctance to share, or ineffective communication.
    - Unknown Self: Parts unknown to self and others, buried deep in subconscious, trauma-related, or forgotten events.
- Uncertainty Reduction Theory: Reduces anxiety by seeking knowledge about others, explains communication initiation, and relationship building.
    - URT Strategies: Passive (observation), Active (information from others), and Interactive (direct exchange) reduce uncertainty and increase predictability.

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2.5: Improving Perception

Clearer Communication

So far, we have learned about the perception process and how we perceive others and ourselves. Now we will turn to a discussion of how to improve our perception. By enhancing our ability to actively listen and empathize with others, we can better understand their perspectives and feelings. This can lead to more meaningful and effective communication, fostering stronger connections and relationships. Additionally, becoming aware of our own biases and stereotypes can help us approach interactions with an open mind and reduce misunderstandings. By practicing perception checking and self-reflection, we can navigate conflicts more constructively and build trust with others. Overall, improving our perception can lead to clearer communication, deeper connections, and more harmonious relationships in both personal and professional settings.

Improving Self-Perception

Our self-perceptions can and do change. Recall that we have an overall self-concept and self-esteem that are relatively stable, and we also have context-specific self-perceptions. Context-specific self-perceptions vary depending on the person with whom we are interacting, our emotional state, and the subject matter being discussed. Becoming aware of the process of self-perception and the various components of our self-concept (which you have already started to do by studying this chapter) will help you understand and improve your self-perceptions.

Since self-concept and self-esteem are so subjective and personal, it would be inaccurate to say that someone's self-concept is "right" or "wrong." Instead, we can identify negative and positive aspects of self-perceptions as well as discuss common barriers to forming accurate and positive self-perceptions. We can also identify common patterns that people experience that interfere with their ability to monitor, understand, and change their self-perceptions. Changing your overall self-concept or self-esteem is not an easy task, given that these are overall reflections on who we are and how we judge ourselves, constructed over many interactions. A variety of life-changing events can relatively quickly alter our self-perceptions. Think of how your view of self changed when you moved from high school to college and beyond. Similarly, other people's self-perceptions likely change when they enter into a committed relationship, have a child, make a geographic move, or start a new job. In Figure 2.5.1, this new father's self-perception, as well as how he accomplishes grocery shopping with his baby in a sling, has changed dramatically since becoming a father.



Figure 2.5.1: Before fatherhood, this man likely had a different self-concept. (CC BY-SA 4.0 Je Porte Mon Bebe via Wikimedia Commons)

Aside from experiencing life-changing events, we can make slower changes to our self-perceptions with concerted efforts aimed at becoming more competent communicators through self-monitoring and reflection. As you actively try to change your self-

perceptions, do not be surprised if you encounter some resistance from significant others. When you change or improve your self-concept, your communication will also change, which may prompt other people to respond to you differently. Although you may have good reasons for changing certain aspects of your self-perception, others may become unsettled or confused by your changing behaviors and communication. Remember, people try to increase predictability and decrease uncertainty within personal relationships.

Example 2.5.1 Reshaping Who You Are

For example, many students begin to take their college education more seriously during their junior and senior years. As these students begin to change their self-concept to include the role of "serious student preparing to graduate and enter the professional world," they likely have friends who want to maintain the "semiserious student who doesn't exert much consistent effort and prefers partying to studying" role that used to be a shared characteristic of both students' self-concepts. As the first student's behavior changes to accommodate this new aspect of their self-concept, it may upset the friend who was used to weeknights spent hanging out rather than studying.

Let's now discuss some suggestions to help avoid common barriers to accurate and positive self-perceptions and patterns of behavior that perpetuate negative self-perception cycles.

Avoid Reliance on Rigid Schema

As we learned earlier, schemata are sets of information based on cognitive and experiential knowledge that guide our interaction. We rely on schemata almost constantly to help us make sense of the world around us. Sometimes schemata become so familiar that we use them as scripts, which prompts mindless communication and can lead us to overlook new information that may need to be incorporated into the schema. So it's important to remain mindful of new or contradictory information that may warrant revision of a schema. Being mindful is difficult, however, especially since we often unconsciously rely on schemata. Think about how, when you're driving a familiar route, you sometimes fall under "highway hypnosis." Despite all the advanced psychomotor skills needed to drive, such as braking, turning, and adjusting to other drivers, we can pull into a familiar driveway or parking lot having driven the whole way on autopilot. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. But have you slipped into autopilot on a familiar route only to remember that you are actually going somewhere else after you've already missed your turn? This example illustrates the importance of keeping our schemata flexible and avoiding mindless communication.

Be Critical of Socializing Forces

We learned earlier that family, friends, sociocultural norms, and the media are just some of the **socializing forces** that influence our thinking and therefore influence our self-perception. These powerful forces serve positive functions but can also set into motion negative patterns of self-perception. Two examples can illustrate the possibility for people to critique and resist socializing forces in order to improve their self-perception. The first deals with physical appearance and notions of health, and the second deals with cultural identities and discrimination.

We have already discussed how the media presents us with narrow and often unrealistic standards for attractiveness. Even though most of us know that these standards don't represent what is normal or natural for the human body, we internalize these ideals, which results in various problems ranging from eating disorders to depression to poor self-esteem. A movement that emerged in the 1960's, partially in response to these narrow representations of the body, is the fat acceptance movement. Periodically, this issue receives more public attention when celebrities who have publicly struggled for years with weight issues embrace a view that weight does not necessarily correspond to health. Many people have found inspiration in that message and have decided that being healthy and strong is more important than being thin (Katz, 2009). The "Healthy at Every Size" movement and the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance have challenged the narrative put out by a multi-billion-dollar-a-year weight-loss industry that fat equals lazy, ugly, and unhealthy. Conflicting scientific studies make it difficult to say conclusively how strong the correlation is between weight and health. Still, it seems clear that a view that promotes healthy living and positive self-esteem over unconditional dieting and a cult of thinness is worth exploring more, given the potential public health implications of distorted body image and obesity.

Beware of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Self-fulfilling prophecies are thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true (Guyll et al., 2010).

Example 2.5.2 Shaping Reality

Imagine a college student believes that their history professor, who is known for being strict, will not provide helpful feedback on assignments. Due to this belief, the student does not engage actively in class discussions and puts minimal effort into their assignments. The result of the student succumbing to this self-fulfilling prophecy is that they receive lower grades on their papers, reinforcing their initial belief that the professor is overly critical and unhelpful.

Although the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies was originally developed to be applied to social inequality and discrimination, it has since been applied in many other contexts, including interpersonal communication. This research has found that some people are chronically insecure, meaning they are very concerned about being accepted by others but constantly feel that other people will dislike them. This can manifest in relational insecurity, which is again based on feelings of inferiority resulting from social comparison with others perceived to be more secure and superior. Such people often end up reinforcing their belief that others will dislike them because of the behaviors triggered by their irrational belief.

Example 2.5.3 Set Up for Failure

Take the following scenario as an example: An insecure person assumes that their date will not like them. During the date, they don't engage in much conversation, disclose negative information about themselves, and exhibit anxious behaviors. Because of these behaviors, their date forms a negative impression and suggests they not see each other again, reinforcing their original belief that the date wouldn't like them.

The example shows how a pattern of thinking can lead to a pattern of behavior that reinforces the thinking, and so on. Luckily, experimental research shows that self-affirmation techniques can be successfully used to intervene in such self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking positive thoughts and focusing on personality strengths can stop this negative cycle of thinking and has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinson et al., 2011).

Create and Maintain Supporting Interpersonal Relationships

Aside from giving yourself affirming messages to help with self-perception, it is important to find interpersonal support. Although most people have at least some supportive relationships, many people also have people in their lives who range from negative to toxic. When people find themselves in negative relational cycles, whether it is with friends, family, or romantic partners, it is difficult to break out of those cycles. But we can all make choices to be around people who will help us be who we want to be and not be around people who hinder our self-progress. This notion can also be taken to the extreme, however. It would not be wise to surround yourself with people who only validate you and do not constructively challenge you, because this too could lead to distorted self-perceptions.

Beware of Distorted Patterns of Thinking and Acting

You already know from our discussion of attribution errors that we all have perceptual biases that distort our thinking. Many of these are common, and we often engage in distorted thinking without being conscious of it. Learning about some of the typical negative patterns of thinking and acting may help us acknowledge and intervene in them. One such pattern involves self-esteem and overcompensation.

People with low self-esteem may act in ways that overcompensate for their feelings of low self-worth and other insecurities. Whether it's a young business professional buying a flashy sports car, a teen showing off the latest tech to their friends, or a homeowner putting in a pool, people often turn to material possessions to try to boost self-esteem. While these purchases may make people feel better in the short term, they may have negative financial effects that can exacerbate negative self-perceptions and lead to interpersonal conflict. People also compensate for self-esteem with their relational choices. A person who is anxious

about their career success may surround themselves with people whom they deem less successful. In this case, being a big fish in a small pond helps some people feel better about themselves when they engage in social comparison.

People can also get into a negative thought and action cycle by setting unrealistic goals and consistently not meeting them. Similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy, people who set unrealistic goals can end up with negative feelings of self-efficacy, which, as we learned earlier, can negatively affect self-esteem and self-concept. The goals we set should be challenging but progressive, meaning we work to meet a realistic goal, then increase our expectations and set another goal, and so on.

Some people develop low self-esteem because they lack accurate information about themselves, which may be intentional or unintentional. A person can intentionally try to maintain high self-esteem by ignoring or downplaying negative comments and beliefs and focusing on positive evaluations. While this can be a good thing, it can also lead to a distorted self-concept. There is a middle ground between beating yourself up and dwelling on the negative and ignoring potentially constructive feedback about weaknesses and missing opportunities to grow as a person. Conversely, people who have low self-esteem or negative self-concepts may discount or ignore positive feedback.

Example 2.5.4 Is That Really You?

A student who has always been told by friends and family that they are a good writer will have high self-esteem about their writing abilities. That perception may be objectively true, or they may have been surrounded by indiscriminate praise and, due to a flawed educational system, given passing grades despite poor writing skills. At some point, whether it be in high school, college, or the workplace, a low score on a writing assignment or a poor work performance review will show that their writing skills need improvement. But doubtless, that high self-esteem will cause the student to at least initially reject negative criticism of their writing.

Incorrect self-perception can have detrimental effects in various aspects of life. For example, an individual who perceives themselves as a skilled public speaker due to only positive feedback may struggle in a professional presentation when faced with critical feedback on their communication style. Similarly, someone who believes they are an excellent problem solver based on past successes may resist seeking help or alternative solutions when faced with a complex challenge, leading to stagnation and missed opportunities for growth.

Overconfidence and inaccurate self-perception can hinder personal and professional development, underscoring the importance of self-awareness and receptiveness to constructive feedback.

Overcoming Barriers to Perceiving Others

There are many barriers that prevent us from competently perceiving others. While some are more difficult to overcome than others, they can all be addressed by raising our awareness of the influences around us and committing to monitoring, reflecting on, and changing some of our communication habits. Whether it is our lazy listening skills, lack of empathy, or stereotypes and prejudice, various filters and blinders influence how we perceive and respond to others.

Develop Empathetic Listening Skills

Effective listening is not easy, and most of us do not make a concerted effort to overcome common barriers to listening. Our fast-paced lives and cultural values that emphasize speaking over listening sometimes make listening feel like a chore. But we shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. **Empathetic listening** can also help us expand our self- and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and taking on different perspectives. Empathetic listening is challenging because it requires cognitive and emotional investment that goes beyond the learning of a skill set.

While empathetic listening is not a substitute for professional help, you can be a helpful sounding board to your friend or roommate as they debate whether to change majors or get a new job. The key to effective empathetic listening is the effort you put into it. You can't "fake" empathic listening because you need to listen intently to the other person so you can respond appropriately. Empathic listening isn't for every situation, but that skill can be helpful as you listen to a friend, partner, or co-worker.

Try This 2.5.1 How Do You Listen Empathetically?

- Demonstrate genuine interest and concern for the speaker's feelings and perspective.
- Provide undivided attention and maintain eye contact to show active engagement.
- Reflect back the speaker's emotions and thoughts to convey understanding and empathy.
- Ask clarifying questions and summarize key points to ensure accurate understanding and to validate the speaker's experiences.

Beware of Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are sets of beliefs that we develop about groups, which we then apply to individuals from that group. Stereotypes are schemata that are taken too far, as they reduce and ignore a person's individuality and the diversity present within a larger group of people. Stereotypes can be based on cultural identities, physical appearance, behavior, speech, beliefs, and values, among other things, and are often caused by a lack of information about the target person or group (Guyll et al., 2010). Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but all run the risk of lowering the quality of our communication.

While the negative effects of stereotypes are pretty straightforward in that they devalue people and prevent us from adapting and revising our schemata, positive stereotypes also have negative consequences.

For example, the "model minority" stereotype has been applied to some Asian cultures in the United States. Seemingly positive stereotypes of Asian Americans as hardworking, intelligent, and willing to adapt to "mainstream" culture are not always received as positive and can lead some people within these communities to feel objectified, ignored, or overlooked.

Stereotyping knows no boundaries and can occur in every facet of society. One example is when individuals may engage in age-related biases. For instance, a person in their early 20s might stereotype older colleagues as technologically challenged. Or, someone in their 30s or 40s may stereotype younger coworkers as entitled or lacking experience. These biases can impact workplace dynamics and communication.

Prejudice is negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities. Prejudice can have individual or widespread negative effects. At the individual level, a hiring manager may not hire someone with a physical disability (even though that would be illegal if it were the only reason), which negatively affects that person. However, if pervasive cultural thinking that people with physical disabilities are mentally deficient leads hiring managers all over the country to make similar decisions, then the prejudice has become a social injustice.

Engage in Self-Reflection

A good way to improve your perceptions and increase your communication competence in general is to engage in self-reflection. If a communication encounter doesn't go well and you want to know why, your self-reflection will be much more useful if you are aware of and can recount your thoughts and actions.

Self-reflection can also help us increase our cultural awareness. Our thought process regarding culture is often "other-focused," meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the adage "know thyself" is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because our taken-for-granted or deeply held beliefs and values may become less certain when we see the multiple perspectives that exist.

We can also become more aware of how our self-concepts influence how we perceive others. We often hold other people to the standards we hold for ourselves or assume that their self-concept should be consistent with our own. For example, if you consider yourself a neat person and think that sloppiness in your personal appearance would show that you are unmotivated, rude, and lazy, then you are likely to think the same of a person you judge to have a sloppy appearance. So asking questions like "Is my impression based on how this person wants to be, or how I think this person should want to be?" can lead to enlightening moments of self-reflection. Asking questions in general about the perceptions you are making is an integral part of perception checking, which we will discuss next.

Checking Perception

Perception checking is a strategy to help us monitor our reactions to and perceptions about people and communication. There are some internal and external strategies we can use to engage in perception checking. In terms of internal strategies, review the various influences on perception that we have learned about in this chapter, and always be willing to ask yourself, "What is influencing the perceptions I am making right now?" Even being aware of what influences are acting on our perceptions makes us more aware of what is happening in the perception process. In terms of external strategies, we can use other people to help verify our perceptions.

The cautionary adage "Things aren't always as they appear" is useful when evaluating your own perceptions. Sometimes it's a good idea to bounce your thoughts off someone, especially if the perceptions relate to some high-stakes situation. But not all situations allow us the chance to verify our perceptions. Preventable crimes have been committed because people who saw something suspicious didn't report it, even though they had a bad feeling about it. Of course, we have to walk a line between being reactionary and being too cautious, which is difficult to manage. We all know that we are ethically and sometimes legally required to report someone to the police who is harming themselves or others, but sometimes the circumstances are much more uncertain.

"Getting Competent": Perception Checking

Perception checking helps us slow down perception and communication processes and allows us to have more control over both. Perception checking involves being able to describe what is happening in a given situation, provide multiple interpretations of events or behaviors, and ask yourself and others questions for clarification. Some of this process happens inside our heads, and some happens through interaction.

While a paraphrase offers the listener the opportunity to check for accuracy and for meaning, the perception check helps the listener determine the emotional state of the speaker. As we've been discussing, nonverbal communication can easily be misinterpreted. A speaker's facial expression that the listener sees as stress might actually be excitement. Or the other way around. Always remember that, while a useful skill, a perception check is for everyday interactions and is not a substitute for serious mental health issues that need professional help. Let's see perception checking in action.

Example 2.5.5 Feeling Heard

Effective use of Perception Check:

Listener: You seem to be angry that I'm late. (Note the "seem to be" indicates a guess.)

Speaker: Possible answer #1: "Yeah, I am mad. This is the third time you've been late when we are meeting for dinner. And now we've lost our reservation and will have to wait at least 30 minutes for another table."

This answer looks like the listener is going to need to do some apologizing and fix some bad habits.

Speaker: Possible answer #2: "No, not really. Just a bit frustrated. We lost our reservation and are going to need to wait another 30 minutes for a table. But I know traffic was heavy. It's ok."

Good thing the listener's friend isn't mad.

But there's a trap with the second answer the listener needs to avoid. If the perception check is presented as fact rather than a guess, the listener is assuming that they know what the speaker is thinking and feeling. These assumptions can cause more problems than they solve. Here's what can happen if we present our perception check as certain rather than tentative.

Example 2.5.6 Making Assumptions

Perception Check gone wrong:

Listener: I can tell you're angry that I'm late.

Speaker: No, not really. Just frustrated.

Listener: No. I know you're mad.

Speaker: I'm not mad. It's ok

Listener: No. I know you're mad. Just admit it.

Assuming there's no denial or other dysfunctional issues going on, the listener has just made a minor incident worse. The speaker wasn't mad at the start of this conversation, but guess what they are now?? Mad!

Always keep your perception check as tentative. You are not a mind reader.

We've learned that enhancing perception through active listening, empathy, and self-reflection is crucial for improved communication and relationships. Understanding self-perception and self-esteem facilitates personal growth, while overcoming barriers like stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies is vital for effective communication. Additionally, perception checking and self-reflection help navigate conflicts and build trust. Finally, we've come to understand that awareness of biases and strong listening skills promote clearer communication and deeper connections, benefiting readers in various aspects of their personal and professional lives.

Key Takeaways

- We can improve self-perception by avoiding reliance on rigid schemata, thinking critically about socializing institutions, intervening in self-fulfilling prophecies, finding supportive interpersonal networks, and becoming aware of cycles of thinking that distort our self-perception.
- We can improve our perceptions of others by developing empathetic listening skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, and engaging in self-reflection.
- Perception checking is a strategy that allows us to monitor our perceptions of and reactions to others and communication.

Attributions

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2.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

This chapter has covered a variety of aspects of perception, including how our perception of ourselves and others shapes our communication through selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. Schemata and social influences impact our self-concept and self-esteem, while attributions and biases influence behavior interpretation. The Johari Window and the Uncertainty Reduction Theory are helpful in understanding the role self-disclosure and our desire to reduce uncertainty play in perception.

Perception involves selecting, organizing, and interpreting information, influencing communication responses based on how stimuli are perceived. We select information based on salience and expectations, organizing it into patterns using proximity, similarity, and difference. Schemata help assign meaning based on accumulated knowledge and experience, shaping our self-concept and self-esteem through interactions, social comparison, and self-discrepancy theories. Socializing forces like family, culture, and media provide feedback that influences self-perception and communication patterns, while self-presentation strategies like prosocial and self-serving presentations impact how we influence others' perceptions.

Attributions interpret behavior, with internal and external attributions connecting behavior to personality traits or situational factors. Perceptual errors like the fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias affect how we attribute behaviors. First and last impressions, physical cues, and cultural identities influence perceptions, while personality traits shape how we see others and ourselves. The Johari Window aids in understanding self-disclosure, with its four parts reflecting known, hidden, blind, and unknown aspects of the self. Uncertainty Reduction Theory and its strategies help reduce anxiety by seeking knowledge about others through passive, active, and interactive means.

Improving self-perception involves critical thinking about socializing institutions, avoiding rigid schemata, and finding supportive networks. Enhancing perceptions of others requires developing empathetic listening skills, addressing stereotypes and prejudice, and engaging in self-reflection. Perception checking serves as a strategy to monitor perceptions and reactions to others and communication, promoting better understanding and effective interactions.

Remember to improve your self-perception, you need to involve critical thinking and supportive networks, while enhancing perceptions of others requires empathetic listening and self-reflection. Perception checking helps monitor reactions and promote effective interactions, addressing biases and stereotypes for better understanding and communication.

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2.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 2

2.1.2: Doctor Giving Instructions

Doctor in a white lab coat gives instructions to their patient laying on a medical scanning machine. Patient is looking up at the doctor. Two other medical assistants stand by the machine.

2.2.1: Group of Hikers

A group of adult men and women hikers in jackets and hiking gear are sitting and standing smiling, posing for the picture with two medium sized dogs during a day hike near Raven Glacier in Alaska. Mountains and snow are in the background.

2.2.2: Boy Scouts Receive Award

Two boy scouts stand on stage during a ceremony as they receive the Eagle scout award, the highest award offered by the Boy Scouts. Many years are needed to complete the rigorous requirements for this award. Boys are holding their certificates toward the audience while their scoutmaster who presented the awards is standing behind a podium next to them.

2.3.2: US Army Crew Chief

At an air show, a young man in US Army Crew Chief fatigues is smiling and looking confidently at the camera as he stands next to the type of helicopter he and his crew services, a military Blackhawk helicopter. The helicopter has a large Red Cross emblem on the front. In the lower left corner of the image is the US Army logo. Across the top of the image in bold yellow letters "Meet Your Army."

2.4.1: The Johari Window

The Johari Window contains four quadrants labeled (in clockwise order): Open Self, Blind Self, Unknown Self, and Hidden Self.

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2.9: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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2.9.1: Exercises

2.1: The Perception Process

1. Take a moment to look around wherever you are right now. Take in the perceptual field around you. What is salient for you in this moment and why? Explain the degree of salience using the three reasons for salience discussed in this section.
2. As we organize information, we simplify and categorize information into patterns. Identify some cases in which this aspect of the perception process is beneficial. Identify some cases in which it could be harmful.
3. Getting integrated: Think about some of the schemata you have that help you make sense of the world around you. For each of the following contexts—academic, professional, and personal, identify a schema that you commonly rely on or think you will rely on. For each schema you identified, note a few ways that it has already been challenged or may be challenged in the future.

2.2: Perceiving Yourself

1. Make a list of characteristics that describe who you are (your self-concept). After looking at the list, see if you can come up with a few words that summarize the list to narrow in on the key features of your self-concept. Go back over the first list and evaluate each characteristic, for example, noting whether it is something you do well/poorly, something that is good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable. Is the overall list more positive or more negative? After doing these exercises, what have you learned about your self-concept and self-esteem?
2. Discuss at least one time in which you had a discrepancy or tension between two of the three selves described by self-discrepancy theory (the actual, ideal, and ought selves). What effect did this discrepancy have on your self-concept and/or self-esteem?
3. Take one of the socializing forces discussed (family/social, culture, or media) and identify at least one positive and one negative influence that it/they have had on your self-concept and/or self-esteem.

2.3: Perceiving Others

1. Think of a recent conflict and how you explained the behavior that caused the conflict and subsequently formed impressions about the other person based on your perceptions. Briefly describe the conflict situation and then identify internal and external attributions for your behavior and the behavior of the other person. Is there any evidence of the fundamental attribution error or self-serving bias in this conflict encounter? If so, what?
2. Describe a situation in which you believe the primacy and/or recency effect influenced your perceptions of a person or event.
3. Has your perception of something ever changed because of exposure to cultural differences? For example, have you grown to like a kind of food, music, clothing, or other custom that you earlier perceived unfavorably?

2.4: Self-Disclosure and Its Impact on Perception

1. Think about your recent interactions on social media or dating apps. Consider what information you chose to disclose about yourself and what you decided to keep private. Write down your thoughts on why you made those choices and how they may have influenced your online interactions and relationships. Think about how self-disclosure impacts your online identity and the perceptions others may have of you.
2. Create your own Johari Window by dividing a piece of paper into four quadrants labeled Open Self, Blind Self, Unknown Self, and Closed Self. Reflect on aspects of yourself that fall into each quadrant based on what you know about yourself and what others may know about you. Consider how a better understanding of these different aspects of self-awareness can impact your relationships and communication dynamics.
3. Think about a recent interaction with someone new, whether in a social setting, at work, or online. Identify which uncertainty reduction strategies you used (passive, active, or interactive) to learn more about the other person and reduce uncertainty. How do these strategies influence your perception of the person and the development of your relationship?

2.5: Improving Perception

1. Which barrier(s) to self-perception do you think present the most challenge to you and why? What can you do to start to overcome these barriers?
2. Which barrier(s) to perceiving others do you think present the most challenge to you and why? What can you do to start to overcome these barriers?
3. Describe a recent communication encounter in which perception checking may have led to a more positive result. What could you have done differently?

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2.9.2: Discussion Questions

2.1: The Perception Process

1. What catches your attention in your surroundings right now, and why do you think it stands out? How do you simplify and categorize information in your daily life, and when is this helpful or harmful?
2. Can you think of a time when simplifying information into patterns helped you understand something better? Have you ever experienced confusion or misunderstanding due to oversimplifying information?
3. Think about a schema (a mental framework) you use in different areas of your life (like school, work, or personal relationships). How has this schema been challenged before, and how might it be challenged in the future?

2.2: Perceiving Yourself

1. What characteristics make up your self-concept, and how do they contribute to your overall identity? Which of these characteristics do you consider positive or negative? Discuss how they influence your self-esteem.
2. Share a time when you experienced a conflict between your actual self and either your ideal or ought self. How did this conflict impact your self-concept and self-esteem? How did you navigate this tension, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Choose a socializing force (family, culture, or media) and discuss one positive and one negative influence it has had on shaping your self-concept and self-esteem. How have these influences impacted the way you perceive yourself and interact with others in different contexts?

2.3: Perceiving Others

1. Recall a recent conflict you experienced and analyze how you attributed behaviors during the conflict. Describe the conflict briefly and identify internal and external attributions for both your behavior and the other person's behavior. Do you notice any signs of the fundamental attribution error or self-serving bias in your perceptions?
2. Reflect on a situation where the primacy or recency effect influenced your perceptions of a person or event. How did the order of information impact your initial impressions or final judgments? Share how these effects shaped your understanding and reactions in that situation.
3. Share an experience in which learning about another culture changed your perspective. This could involve food, music, clothing, traditions, holidays, language, or another cultural practice. Discuss how the experience influenced your understanding or appreciation of cultural differences.

2.4: Self Disclosure and Its Impact on Perception

1. Share a recent experience from your interactions on social media or dating apps. Discuss what information you chose to reveal and what you decided to keep private. Why do we make those choices?
2. How can better understanding the aspects of the Johari Window quadrants (Open, Blind, Unknown, and Closed) of others improve our relationships? How can this understanding of others' self-perceptions contribute to stronger group dynamics?
3. Share a recent interaction with a new acquaintance and identify the uncertainty reduction strategies you employed (passive, active, or interactive). Discuss how these strategies influence our self-perception and our perception of others.

2.5: Improving Perception

1. Discuss how actively listening and empathizing with others can enhance understanding and communication. How can practicing empathy lead to more meaningful and effective interactions, fostering stronger connections and relationships among group members?
2. Consider the impact of biases and stereotypes on perception within a group dynamic. How can becoming aware of these biases help approach interactions with an open mind and reduce misunderstandings within the group? Share examples of how biases may influence group dynamics and communication.
3. Explore the concept of self-reflection and perception checking and how these concepts can improve interpersonal

communication. How can engaging in self-reflection and perception checking help navigate conflicts and build trust? Discuss how these practices can lead to clearer communication and more meaningful relationships.

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3: VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Overview

The words we use in our day-to-day interactions with others can have an instant and profound effect on our listeners. How our messages are interpreted depends on several factors, including our word choice, tone of voice, intonation, gestures, facial expression, and our cultural background. Verbal and Nonverbal Communication go hand in hand, and some scholars argue that Nonverbal Communication (facial expressions and gestures) is even more telling to the audience than Verbal Communication (the words we use). While the statistics on this vary somewhat, most would agree that the two elements complement each other in language usage across the globe.

In this chapter, our focus is on Verbal Communication, which is the delivery of words in specific modalities (either written or spoken) and within particular contexts. Other factors that contribute to verbal communication include social, cultural, and personal elements that are used to construct our messages and convey meaning.

Chapter Goals

- Identify, locate, evaluate, and use information technologies and sources.
- Comprehend the concept of meta messages
- Understand how naming and identity can influence perceptions
- Identify the differences between sexist and racist language
- Examine ways to improve our vocabulary

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Abstraction Ladder
- Abstract
- Affiliation
- Bias
- Connotative
- Converge
- Cultural Factors
- Denotative
- Diverge
- Emojis
- Generational factors
- Heuristic Functions
- Imaginative Functions
- Instrumental Functions
- Interactional Functions
- Language
- Language Adaptation
- Language Awareness
- Metamessages
- Muted Group Theory
- Nonverbal Cues
- Personal Functions

- Pragmatic Rules
- Racism
- Racist Language
- Regulatory Functions
- Representational Functions
- Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis
- Semantic Rules
- Sexism
- Sexist Language
- Syntactic Rules

3.1: Verbal Communication is Spoken, Written...and Typed

3.2: How Words Work

3.3: Functions of Language

3.4: Types of Language

3.5: Improving Verbal Communication

3.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

3.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 3

3.8: References

3.9: Teacher Resources

3.9.1: Exercises

3.9.2: Discussion Questions

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3.1: Verbal Communication is Spoken, Written...and Typed

Room for Misinterpretation

Misinterpretation of messages is not uncommon, but is most noticeable in text-based communication. This miscommunication can be attributed to the lack of **nonverbal cues** such as facial expressions, gestures, and vocal tone. Generational factors, differences in cultural background, and/or regional origin between the sender and receiver may also contribute to incorrect message decoding.

Have you ever said something to someone only to find it wasn't received as well as you'd hoped? How about when you wrote or texted someone, and the message was received differently from how you intended? Some of the most common problems in interpersonal communication stem from the use of language, both written and spoken. Individuals report that text messages lead to more miscommunication than phone calls or face-to-face interactions (Johnson, Bostwick, & Anderson, 2016, as cited in Kelly & Miller-Ott, 2018).

Consider the following exchange between two friends, Jade and Sameer:

Example 3.1.1 Verbal Communication In Person

Scenario: Jade and Sameer are conversing face-to-face:

Jade: "See you at 5?"

Sameer: "K."

Impact: The conversation is clear and concise with little to no room for misinterpretation.

In this example, Jade and Sameer have agreed to meet at 5 pm. The message from Jade was sent with clarity and conciseness and was received as Jade intended, by Sameer. The two exchange goodbyes and leave to continue their day before their agreed-upon 5 pm meeting. Now let's look at the exchange between Jade and Sameer again:

Example 3.1.2 Verbal Communication Via Text

Scenario: Jade and Sameer are conversing via text:

Jade: "See you at 5?"

Sameer: "K."

Impact: Without the benefit of nonverbal cues or emojis to add nuance and tone to the already brief dialogue, there is a greater possibility for misunderstanding between the two participants.

In this example, one might again think that there is not much to be concerned about, as the interaction between Jade and Sameer appears straightforward and concise, as in example 3.1.1, with little room for misinterpretation. However, since this brief dialogue was exchanged via text, without the added benefit of nonverbal cues, such as facial expression or vocal tone, there is a greater possibility for misunderstanding.



Figure 3.1.1: Text messaging has been shown to lead to more miscommunication than phone calls or face-to-face interactions. (CC BY 2.0; Jhaymesisviphotography via Openverse)

Jade is now worried that Sameer is annoyed with her. In addition to the absence of nonverbal communication to help moderate the interaction, Jade's concern is heightened because the text exchange came with an absence of visual cues, such as **emojis,** small digital images to help express emotion**,** and regulate the message. She now wonders why Sameer texted “K” as a response to her message instead of “K :)" or "OK" followed by a smiley face emoji. In Example 3.1.1, the exchange occurred in person, with the added benefit of nonverbal cues, which made for a clear interaction, with no misinterpretation by sender or receiver.

In reality, Sameer texted one letter, "K," because he was in a hurry to jump into the shower and get ready to see Jade. He was excited to see her, though the brevity of his message might have indicated otherwise.

The above examples provide insight as to how language can shape our perceptions. In Example 3.1.1, which occurred in person, Jade and Sameer both had the same perception of the message that was exchanged, and there was an agreement made based upon their shared perception. In Example 3.1.2, which occurred via text, Jade and Sameer had two very different perceptions of the same message. One person was worried, and the other person was excited. This chapter examines verbal communication because we know that words are powerful. The words we use can impact how others perceive us and how we perceive them.

What Factors Caused the Miscommunication in the Text Exchange Between Jade and Sameer?

One or more of the following factors may have contributed to the miscommunication:

- The lack of words in Sameer's message from which to derive meaning.
- The lack of emojis to help regulate and add nuance, softness, and/or empathy to the message. (Huh, 2025).
- The lack of nonverbal cues to help contextualize the message (facial expression, body language, and/or vocal intonation) to aid in the interpretation of the tone of the message (Kelly & Miller-Ott, 2018) or
- **Cultural factors:** The Country of origin, region of origin within the same country, religious background, values, socioeconomic background, and familial upbringing all play a role in how one communicates. Some cultures (even within the same country) value brevity in their messages, while others may rely on more detailed exchanges to get ideas across. For example, within the United States, someone from Kentucky might respond differently to the question "How are you?" than someone from New York (Roger & Richard, 2017, pp. 109–136).
- **Generational factors:** The distinct values, beliefs, and behaviors shaped by the unique social, cultural, and technological experiences of different age groups can have a profound effect on communication. If a sender and receiver are from different generations, the message may be sent and received in a very conflicting manner. For example, a member of Generation Z (1997-2012) might value brevity and subsequently not focus on punctuation in their messages. While a member of the Baby Boomer Generation (1946-1964) might value detail and proper syntax in their messages. (Takatama & Yang, 2023).

In today's world, many individuals rely heavily on text messaging for their verbal communication, both professionally and within their interpersonal relationships. This is a particularly convenient method of communication during the early stages of the development of a relationship. Individuals tend to believe that a lot of miscommunication occurs through text-based interaction, but little research has focused on actual instances of text-based miscommunication. Given the importance of text messaging in relational processes, research is warranted to explore the content of texted interactions to determine what individuals view as miscommunication and why it occurs (Kelly & Miller-Ott, 2018).

In the following pages, we will explore the various factors that contribute to creating effective verbal communication, both in spoken and written/typed forms.

Key Takeaways

- Written communication is something people rely upon both in personal and professional communication.
- Written text can convey different messages, depending on the language used as well as the amount of language used.
- Written text can convey different messages depending on the number of regulators, such as emojis, used to add nuance to the message.
- Cultural factors, such as the origin and upbringing of the sender/receiver, can also add value to how a message is interpreted.
- As writing continues to sustain and thrive in personal and professional communication, research is warranted to explore how and why miscommunications occur.

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3.2: How Words Work

What is Language?

Language is a system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols. Language consists of the use of words in a structured way. Language helps us understand others' wants, needs, and desires. Language can help create connections, but it can also pull us apart. Language is so vital to communication. Imagine if you never learned a language; how would you be able to function? Without language, how could you develop meaningful connections with others? Language allows us to express ourselves and obtain our goals.

Language is the most important element in human communication. Language is made up of words, which are arbitrary symbols. In this chapter, we will learn about how words work, the functions of language, and how to improve verbal communication.

Example 3.2.1 Is it a Soda, a Pop, or a Coke?

Scenario: Neal refers to a shopping cart as a buggy, while Laney calls it a cart. There are several ways to say we would like a beverage, such as "liquid refresher," "soda," "Coke," "pop," "refreshment," or "drink." A pacifier for a baby is sometimes called a "paci," "binkie," "sookie," or "mute button."

Impact: Linguist Robin Tolmach Lakoff (Lakoff, 2001) asks, "How can something that is physically just puffs of air, a mere stand-in for reality, have the power to change us and our world?" This example illustrates that meanings are in people, and words don't necessarily represent what they mean. While varied terminology can lead to momentary misunderstandings, especially in cross-regional or cross-cultural conversations, it also contributes to the diverse fabric of society. These differences in vocabulary can be viewed as a reflection of the creativity, history, and adaptability of society.

Many people incorrectly assume that verbal communication only means spoken words. As discussed in Section 3.1, verbal communication can be both written and spoken. Generally, verbal communication refers to our use of words, while nonverbal communication includes methods like body language, gestures, and silence.

Words and Meaning

Words can have different rules to help us understand their meaning. There are three rules applied to verbal communication that we will examine: semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic.

Semantic Rules

First, **semantic rules** are the dictionary definition of the word. However, the meaning can change based on the context in which it is used. For instance, the word fly by itself does not mean anything. It makes more sense if we put the word into a context by saying things like, "There is a fly on the wall," "I will fly to Dallas tomorrow," "That girl is so fly," or "The fly on your pants is open!" We would not be able to communicate with others if we did not have semantic rules.

Example 3.2.2 Awkward but Amusing

Scenario: During a grammar lesson, a third-grade teacher asked the class about 'periods'. One male student in the class raised his hand and went into a detailed explanation about how girls have monthly periods. He did not realize that the teacher meant the use of periods for punctuation at the end of a sentence.

Impact: Understanding semantic rules is crucial to avoiding embarrassment or misunderstandings.

Syntactic Rules

Second, **syntactic rules** govern how we help guide the words we use. Syntactic rules can refer to the use of grammar, structure, and punctuation to help effectively convey our ideas. For instance, we can say “Where are you?” as opposed to “where are you,” which can convey a different meaning and have different perceptions. The same thing can happen when you don’t place a comma in the right place. The comma can make a big difference in how people understand a message.

A great example of how syntactic rules work is the Star Wars character, Yoda, who often speaks with different rules. He has said, “Named must be your fear before banish it, you can,” and “Happens to every guy sometimes this does.” This example illustrates that syntactic rules can vary based on culture or background.

Another example is Figure 3.2.1. In this case, we learn the importance that a comma can have in written language. In the first instance, “Let’s eat, grandma!” is quite different than the second one, “Let’s eat, grandma!” The first implies cannibalism, and the second a family dinner. As the image says, punctuation saves lives.

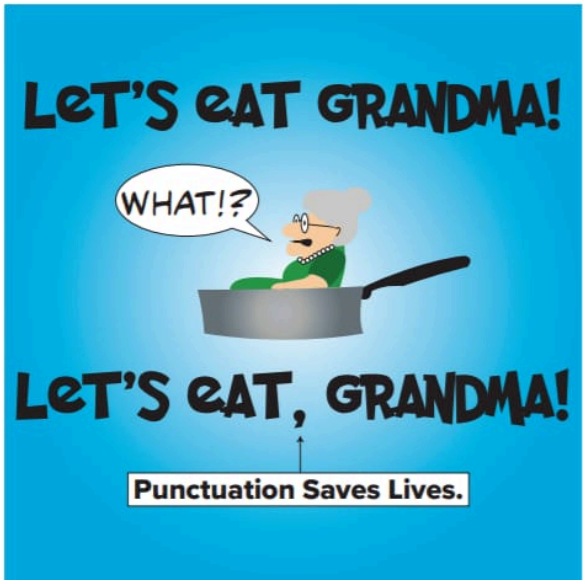


Figure 3.2.1: A cartoon of the importance of commas, which states "Punctuation Saves Lives", where misplacing it in one version states "Let's Eat Grandma!" and putting it in makes a more meaningful but less hilarious sentence of "Let's eat, Grandma!"(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; Wrench, Punyanunt-Carter, Thweatt, via Pressbooks)

Pragmatic Rules

Third, **pragmatic rules** help us interpret messages by analyzing the interaction completely. We need to consider the words used, how they are stated, our relationship with the speaker, and the objectives of our communication. For instance, the words “I want to see you now” would mean different things if the speaker were your boss versus your lover. One could be a positive connotation, and another might be a negative one. The same holds for humor. If we know that the other person understands and appreciates sarcasm, we might be more likely to engage in that behavior and perceive it differently from someone who takes every word literally.

Most pragmatic rules are based on culture and experience. For instance, the term “Netflix and chill” often means that two people will hook up. Imagine someone from a different country who did not know what this meant; they would be shocked if they thought they were going to watch Netflix with the other person and just relax. Another example would be “Want to have a drink?”, which usually implies an alcoholic beverage. Another way of saying this might be to say, “Would you like something to drink?” The second sentence does not imply that the drink has to contain alcohol.

It is common for people to text in capital letters when they are angry or excited. You would interpret the text differently if the text were not in capital letters. For instance, “I love you” might be perceived differently from “I LOVE YOU!!!” Thus, when communicating with others, you should also realize that pragmatic rules can impact the message.

Words Create Reality

Language helps to create reality. Often, humans will label their experiences. For instance, the word “success” has different interpretations depending on your perceptions. Success to you might be a certain type of car or a certain amount of income. However, for someone else, success might be the freedom to do what they love or to travel to exotic places. Success might mean something different based on your background or your culture.

Another example might be the word “intimacy.” Intimacy to one person might be something similar to love, but to another person, it might be the psychological connection that you feel to another person. Words can impact a person’s reality of what they believe and feel.

If a child complains that they don’t feel loved, but the parents/guardians argue that they continuously show affection by giving hugs and doing fun shared activities, who would you believe? The child might say that they never heard their parents/guardians say the word love, and hence, they don’t feel love. So, when we argue that words can create a person’s reality, that is what we mean. Specific words can make a difference in how a person will receive the message. That is why certain rhetoricians and politicians will spend hours looking for the right word to capture the true essence of a message. A personal trainer might be careful to use the word “overweight” as opposed to “fat,” because it just sounds drastically different. At Disney World, they call their employees “cast members” rather than workers, because it gives the perception that each person has a part in helping to run the show. Even on a resume, you might select words that set you apart from the other applicants. For instance, if you were a cook, you might say “culinary artist.” It gives the impression that you weren’t just cooking food; you were making masterpieces with food. Words matter, and how they are used will make a difference.

Words Reflect Attitudes

When we first fall in love with someone, we use positive adjectives to describe that person. However, if you have fallen out of love with that person, you might use negative or neutral words to describe that same person. Words can reflect attitudes. Some people can label one experience as pleasant, and another person can have the opposite experience. This difference is because words reflect our attitudes about things. If a person has positive emotions towards another, they might say that that person is funny, mature, and thrifty. However, if the person has negative feelings or attitudes towards that same person, they might describe them as childish, old, and cheap. These words can give a clue about how the person perceives them.

Level of Abstraction

When we think of language, it can be pretty abstract. For example, when we say something is “interesting,” it can be positive or negative. That is what we mean when we say that language is **abstract**. Language can be very specific. You can tell someone specific things to help them better understand what you are trying to say by using specific and concrete examples. Consider the following exchange:

Example 3.2.3 Abstract Communication

Scenario: Valerie and Khan are having a discussion that becomes heated.

Valerie: “You are rude!”

Khan: "Excuse me?"

Impact: Valerie remains angry with Khan. Khan, meanwhile, is upset and confused by Valerie's words.

This exchange between Valerie and Khan is vague and offers little context as to why Valerie has determined that Khan is a rude person. Khan, the recipient of the insult from Valerie, might get angry and wonder why Valerie made that statement that he is rude. To be clearer, it might be better for Valerie to say something more definitive. Consider the following exchange:

Example 3.2.4 Concrete Communication

Scenario: Valerie and Khan are having a discussion that is more detailed and specific in content.

Valerie: “When I texted you yesterday to see what your plans were, and you didn't bother to respond, I was insulted. I am busy, but I took time out to check in with you, but you didn't take time out to acknowledge my text, which I found rude.”

Khan: "I understand. I am sorry about that."

Impact: The two friends can work through their differences through a detailed conversation.

This exchange between Valerie and Khan is much more detailed and specific. It enables the two friends to work through their differences through concrete explanations, examples, and reasoning.

In 1941, linguist S.I. Hayakawa created a concept known as the **abstraction ladder** (Figure 3.2.2). The abstraction ladder starts abstract at the top, while the bottom rung is very concrete. In Figure 2, we’ve shown how you can go from abstract ideas (e.g., information) through various levels of more concrete ideas down to the most concrete idea (e.g., interpersonal communication). Ideally, you can see that as we move down the ladder, the topic becomes more fine-tuned and concrete (Janicki, 2024).

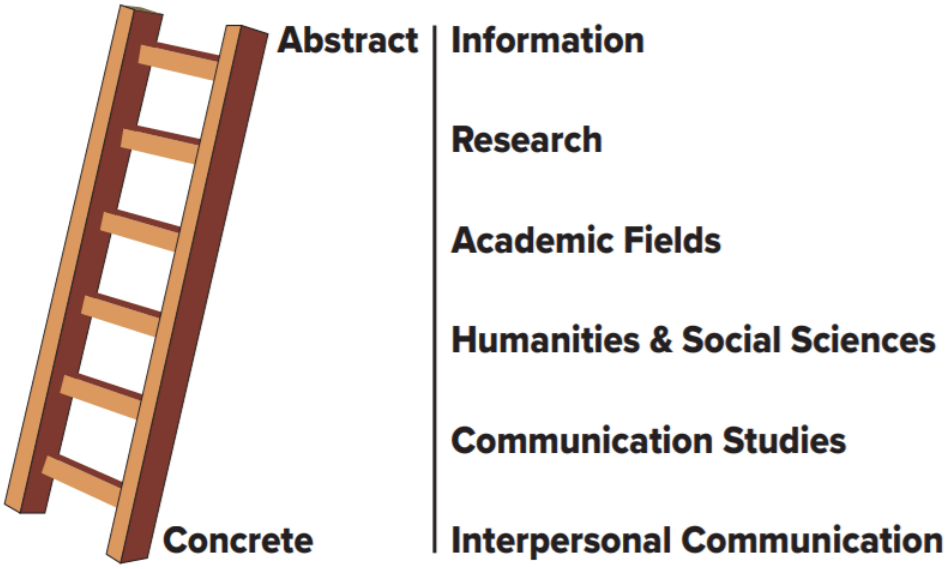


Figure 3.2.2: Abstraction Ladder: A graphic depicting a ladder that begins at the level of Concrete ideas and concepts and provides Interpersonal Communication as an example of Concrete Ideas. The ladder moves up toward very Abstract ideas and concepts, and provides Information and research as examples of abstract ideas. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; Wrench, Punyanunt-Carter, Thweatt, via Pressbooks)

In our daily lives, we tend to use high levels of abstraction all the time. For instance, growing up, your parents/guardians probably helped you with homework, cleaning, cooking, and transporting you from one event to another. Yet, we don’t typically say thank you to everything; we might make a general comment, such as a thank you, rather than saying, “Thank you so much for helping me with my math homework and helping me figure out how to solve for the volume of spheres.” It takes too long to say that, so people tend to be abstract. However, abstraction can cause problems if you don’t provide enough description.

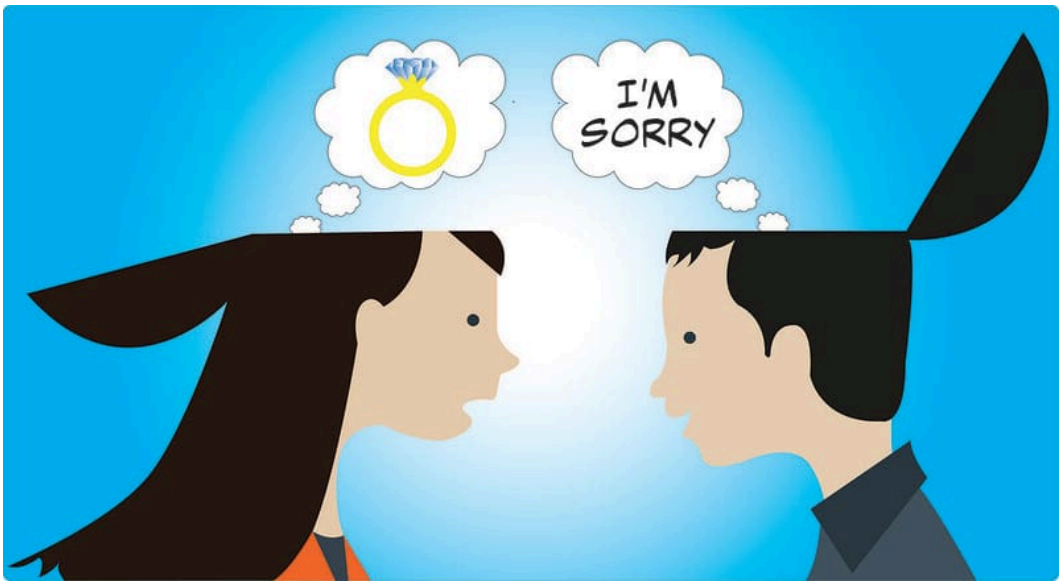


Figure 3.2.3: Perception is Key. A cartoon depicting a male-female couple engaged in a discussion, whereby the female assumes her partner is about to propose to her, while the male assumes his partner is about to apologize to him. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; Wrench, Punyanunt-Carter, Thweatt, via Pressbooks)

Metamessages

Metacommunication is known as communication about communication. Yet, **metamessages** are relationship messages that are sent among people with whom they communicate. These messages can be verbal, nonverbal, direct, or indirect. For instance, if you see two friends just talking about what they did last weekend, they are also sending metamessages as they talk. Metamessages can convey affection, appreciation, disgust, ridicule, scorn, or contempt. Every time you send messages to others, notice the metamessages that they might be sending you. Do they seem upset or annoyed with certain things that you say? In this book, we want to stress the importance of mindfulness when speaking. You may not realize what metamessages you are sending out to others.

Words and Meanings

Words can have denotative meanings or connotative meanings. In this section, we will learn about the differences and the triangle of meaning. Researchers by the names of Ogden and Richards noticed that misunderstandings occur when people associate different meanings with the same message. Their model (Figure 3.2.4) illustrates that there is an indirect association between a word and the actual referent or thing it represents.

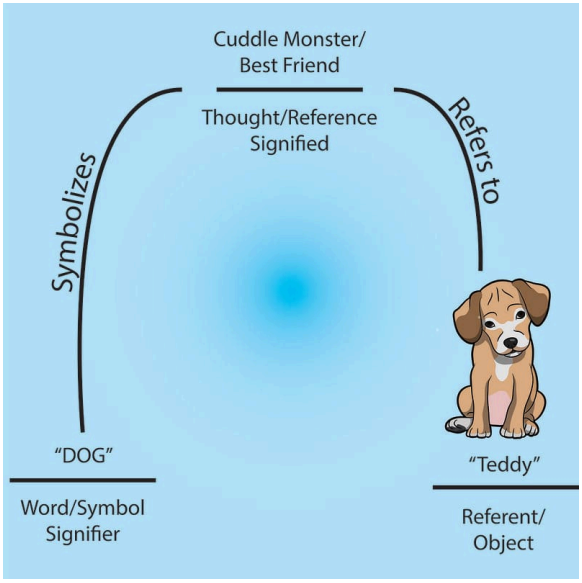


Figure 3.2.4: Signifier, Signified, and Referent, Words as Symbolized and Words as Referent. A cartoon showing the word "DOG" with words "'Word/Symbol Signifier beneath them. A line from these words points up to the top/center of the image with the words "Cuddle Monster/Best Friend", which is the implied meaning of the dog. From here, a line points downward to the bottom of the image, which has a drawing of a beagle, with the word "Teddy" and the words "Referent/Object" beneath them. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; Wrench, Punyanunt-Carter, Thweatt, via Pressbooks)

As you can see, when you hear the word “dog,” it conjures up different meanings for different people. The word “dog” itself is a symbol and signifier, or sound elements or other linguistic symbols that represent an underlying concept or meaning. When we hear the word “dog,” it is what we call the “signified,” or the meaning or idea expressed when someone hears the word. In this case, maybe you have a dog, and you see that dog as your best friend, or, as in my case, you call him your little “cuddle monster” because he always wants to be connected to you at all times. Again, the meaning that we attach to the symbol is still separate from the physical entity itself. In this case, there is a real dog named Teddy, who is the referent, or the physical thing that a word or phrase denotes or stands for.

Words can have a **denotative** meaning, which is the dictionary definition. These are words that most people are familiar with, and they can all agree on the understanding of those words. If you asked a person what a car or a phone is, they would most likely know what you are talking about when you use those words.

Words can have a **connotative** meaning, which is a subjective definition of the word. The word might mean something different from what you meant. For example, you may hear someone referring to their baby. You could fairly safely assume that the person is referring to their infant, but just as easily, they could be referring to a significant other.

Key Takeaways

- Words have denotative and connotative meanings. Denotations are the dictionary definition, and connotations are what the words imply.
- Sometimes confusion occurs because people are too abstract in their language. To be clear and concise in language, you need to be as descriptive and specific as possible.
- Researchers note that misunderstandings occur when people associate different meanings with the same message.
- Metamessages are essentially messages within messages, or meaning within meaning.
- Metamessages involve several meanings and can be conveyed nonverbally and verbally.

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3.3: Functions of Language

Language and Meaning

Based on research examining how children learn language, it was found that children are trying to create “meaning potential.” In other words, children learn language so they can understand and be understood by others. As children grow older, language serves different functions.

Children will typically communicate in a fashion that lets parents/guardians know what they want to do. When children are born, parents/guardians have to figure out if the child is hungry, thirsty, dirty, or sick. Later, when the child acquires language, the child can let the parent/guardian know what they want by using simple words like “eat” or “drink.”

Instrumental and Regulatory Functions

Instrumental functions use language to fulfill a need. To meet our needs, we need to use language that other people understand.

Language can help us define what we can or cannot do. Often, you might see campaigns that say “Don’t drink and drive” or “Don’t text and drive” to help curb driving behaviors.

Regulatory functions of language are to influence the behaviors of others through requests, rules, or persuasion. These functions do not necessarily coincide with our needs. These might be advertisements that tell us to eat healthier or exercise more using specific products.

Interactional and Imaginative Functions

Interactional functions of language are used to help maintain or develop the relationship. Interactional functions also help to alleviate the interaction. Examples might include “Thank you,” “Please,” or “I care about you.”

Imaginative functions of language help to create imaginary constructs and tell stories. This use of fantasy usually occurs in play or leisure activities. People who role-play in video games will sometimes engage in imaginative functions to help their character be more effective and persuasive.

Personal Functions

Next, we have **personal functions**, or the use of language to help you form your identity or sense of self. In job interviews, people are asked, “How do you describe yourself?” For some people, this is a challenging question because it showcases what makes you who you are. The words you pick, as opposed to others, can help define who you are.

Perhaps someone told you that you were funny. You never realized that you were funny until that person told you. Because they used the word “funny” as opposed to “silly” or “crazy,” it caused you to have perceptions about yourself. This example illustrates how words serve as a personal function for us. Personal functions of language are used to express identity, feelings, and opinions.

Heuristic and Representational Functions

The **heuristic function** of language is used to learn, discover, and explore. The heuristic function could include asking several questions during a lecture or adding commentary to a child’s behavior. Another example might be “What is that tractor doing?” or “Why is the cat sleeping?”

Representational functions of language are used to request or relay information. These statements are straightforward and do not seek an explanation. For instance, “my cat is asleep” or “the kitchen light isn’t working.”

Cultural Functions

We know a lot about a culture based on the language that the members of the group speak. Some words exist in other languages, but we do not have them in English. For instance, in China, there are five different words for shame, but in the English language, we only have one word for shame. Anthropologist Franz Boas studied the Inuit people of Baffin Island, Canada, in the late 1800s and noted that they had many different words for "snow." It's become a myth over the years that the Inuit have 50 different words for snow (Kelly, 2019). In reality, as Laura Kelly points out, there are several Inuit languages, so this myth is problematic because it attempts to generalize to all of them. Instead, the Eskimo-Aleut language tends to have long, complicated words that describe ideas; whereas, in English, we'd have a sentence to say the same thing. As such, the Eskimo-Aleut language probably has 100s of different words that can describe snow.

Analyzing the Hopi language, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf discovered that there is no difference between nouns and verbs. To the Hopi people, their language showcases how their world and perceptions of the world are always in constant flux. The Hopi believe that everything is evolving and changing. Their conceptualization of the world is that there is continuous time. As Whorf wrote, "After a long and careful analysis, the Hopi language is seen to contain no words, grammatical forms, constructions or expressions that refer directly to what we call 'time', or to past, present or future."

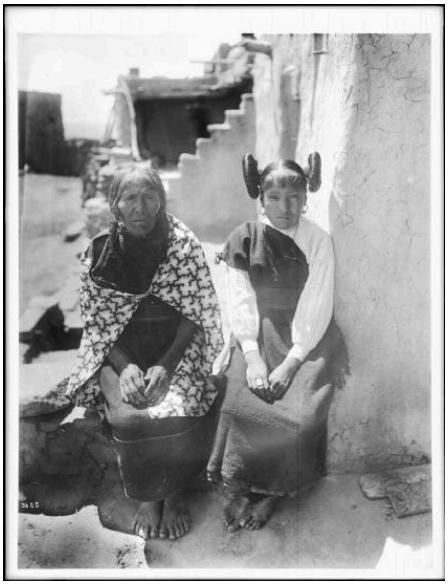


Figure 3.3.1: A Hopi mother and daughter sit outside in the Southwestern U.S. in the early 1900s. The Hopi believe that everything is evolving and changing; their language, therefore, contains no words that reference the past, present, or future. (CC BY 2.0; C.C. Pierce via Wikimedia Commons)

A very popular theory that helps us understand how culture and language coexist is the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.** Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf created this hypothesis to help us understand cultural differences in language use. The theory suggests that language impacts perceptions by showing a culture's worldview. The hypothesis is also seen as linguistic determinism, which is the perspective that language influences our thoughts.

Sometimes, language has special rooted characteristics or linguistic relativity. Language can express our thoughts and feelings as well. In other words, language not only represents things, but also how we feel about things. For instance, in the United States, most houses will have backyards. In Japan, due to limited space, most houses do not have backyards, and thus, it is not represented in their language. Many Japanese do not understand the concept of a backyard, and they don't have a word for a backyard. All in all, language helps to describe our world and how we understand our world.

Key Takeaways

- Instrumental functions explain that language can help us accomplish tasks, and the regulatory function explains that language can help us control behavior.
- Interactional functions help us maintain information, and imaginative functions allow us to create worlds with others.
- Language allows creativity and fantasy, such as storytelling or role-playing in games.
- Language expresses identity, personality, feelings, and opinions.

- When we talk with others, language can be personal, ritual, or cultural. Personal functions help us identify ourselves. Ritual functions of language involve words that we routinely say to others, such as “hello” or “goodbye.” Cultural functions of language help us describe the worldview or perspectives of culture.

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3.4: Types of Language

Influences on Language

New parents/guardians typically spend a great deal of time trying to pick just the right name for their newborn. We know that names can impact other people's perceptions. Our names impact how we feel and how we behave. For instance, if you heard that someone was named Stacy, you might think that person was female, nice, and friendly, and you would be surprised if that person turned out to be male, mean, and aggressive.

People with unusual names tend to have more emotional distress than those with common names. Imagine being an elementary school student, an impressionable age, where children can be cruel. Having an unusual name during roll call can be a nightmare. Names impact our identity because others will typically have negative perceptions of unusual names or unique spellings of names. Names can change over time and can gain acceptance. For instance, the name Madison was not even considered a female first name until the movie "Splash" in the 1980s (Ågren, 2014).

Some names are very distinctive, which also makes them memorable and recognizable. Think about musical artists or celebrities with unique names. It helps you remember them, and it helps you distinguish that person from others.

Some of the names encompass cultural or ethnic identity. In the popular book, Freakonomics, the authors showed a relationship between names and socioeconomic status. They discover that a popular name usually starts with high socioeconomic families, and then it becomes popular with lower socioeconomic families. Hence, it is very conceivable to determine the socioeconomic status of people you associate with based on their birth date and name. Figure 3.4.1 shows some of the more popular baby names for girls and boys, along with names that are non-binary.

Table 3.4.1 is divided into three sections. The left column indicates popular male names, the middle column shows popular female names, and the right column shares non-binary/gender neutral names.

Table 3.4.1: Popular Baby Names in the Early 21st Century. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; Wrench, Punyanunt-Carter, Thweatt, via Interpersonal Communication)

Boys	Girls	Non-Binary
Liam	Emma	Sam
Noah	Olivia	Alex
William	Ava	Emery
James	Isabella	Corey
Oliver	Sophia	Ari
Benjamin	Charlotte	Cameron
Elijah	Mia	Frankie
Lucas	Amelia	Remi
Mason	Harper	River
Logan	Evelyn	Skylar (or Skyler)

Affiliation

When we want others to associate with us or have an **affiliation** with us, we might change the way we speak and the words we use. All of those things can impact how other people relate to us. Researchers found that when potential romantic partners employed the same word choices regarding pronouns and prepositions, interest also increased. At the same time, couples who used similar word choices when texting each other significantly increased their relationship duration. This study implies that we often inadvertently mimic other people's use of language when we focus on what they say.

If you have been in a romantic relationship for a long period, you might create special expressions or jargon for the other person, and that specialized vocabulary can create greater closeness and understanding. The same line of thinking occurs for groups in a gang or persons in the military. If we adapt to the other person's communication style or **converge**, then we can also impact perceptions of affiliation. Research has shown that people who have similar speech also have more positive feelings for each other. However, speech can also work in the opposite direction when we **diverge**, or when we communicate in a very different fashion. For instance, a group from another culture might speak the same dialect, even though they can speak English, to create distance and privacy from others.

Sexism and Racism

Before discussing the concepts of sexism and racism, we must understand the term "bias." **Bias** is an attitude that is not objective or balanced, prejudiced, or the use of words that intentionally or unintentionally offend people or express an unfair attitude concerning a person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or illness. We'll explore more on the issue of biased language later in this chapter.

Sexism or bias against others based on their sex can come across in language. **Sexist language** can be defined as "words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either sex."[18] Language can impact how we feel about ourselves and others. For instance, there is a magazine called *Working Mother*, but there is not one called "Working Father." Even though many men who work are also fathers, there are no words that distinguish them from other working men. Whereas women who both work and are mothers are distinguished from other women who solely work, and from women who are solely mothers and/or wives.

Think about how language has changed over the years. We used to have occupations that were highly male-dominated in the workplace, and had words to describe them. For instance, policemen, firemen, and chairmen are now police officers, firefighters, and chairpersons. The same can also be said for some female-dominated occupations. For instance, stewardesses, secretaries, and waitresses have been changed to include males and are often called flight attendants, office assistants, and servers. Thus, to eliminate sexism, we need to be cautious of the word choices we use when talking with others. Sexist language will impact perceptions, and people might be swayed about a person's capability based on the word choices.

Similarly, **racism** is the bias people have towards others of a different race. **Racist language** conveys that a racial group is superior or better than another race. Some words in English have racial connotations. Aaron Smith-McLallen, Blair T. Johnson, John Dovidio, and Adam Pearson wrote:

> In the United States and many other cultures, the color white often carries more positive connotations than the color black. Terms such as "Black Monday," "Black Plague", "black cats," and the "black market" all have negative connotations, and literature, television, and movies have traditionally portrayed heroes in white and villains in black. The empirical work of John E. Williams and others throughout the 1960s demonstrated that these positive and negative associations with the colors black and white, independent of any explicit connection to race, were evident among Black and White children as young as 3 years old, as well as adults.

Another important factor influencing the impact of messages is the speaker's title, authority, and perceived credibility. The President of the United States holds one of the most powerful positions in the world and is often described as the leader of the free world. As a result, the president's words and actions can strongly influence how people think and behave, both in the United States and globally.

> "When a President of the United States speaks a word...it sounds like a shout, even if it is a whisper, because of who it is coming from and what it means and the impact it has..."
>
> Kamala Harris, Former Vice President of the United States (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2025)

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, there was an ongoing debate in the United States as to whether President Trump's use of the phrase "Chinese Virus" when referring to the coronavirus was racially insensitive. The argument for its racial insensitivity was that the President was specifically using the term as an "other" technique to allow his followers to place blame on Chinese people for the coronavirus. Unsurprisingly, as a result of the use of the phrase "Chinese Virus," there were numerous violent attacks against individuals of Asian descent within the United States. The crimes were not only directed at people of Chinese descent, but toward people of various East Asian backgrounds. The people who were generally inflamed by this rhetoric didn't take the time to distinguish among people they labeled as "other".



Figure 3.4.2 President Donald Trump, speaking from the White House Diplomatic Reception Room on September 22, 2020. Trump's use of the phrase "China Virus" to describe the coronavirus was deemed racially insensitive by many, especially in light of its role in fueling hate crimes against people of East Asian descent. (Public Domain; United States Federal Government via Wikimedia Commons)

It is important to note that many words do not imply any sexual or racial connotations. However, some people might use it to make judgments or expectations of others. For example, when describing a bad learning experience, the student might say “Black professor” or “female student” as opposed to just saying the student and professor argued. These descriptors can be problematic and sometimes not even necessary in the conversation. When using those types of words, it can create slight factors of sexism/racism.

Muted Group Theory

Muted group theory was initially developed to explain the way humans, specifically men and women, communicate. The theory claims that man-made communication is, just that, “man-made". Similar to standpoint theory, which rose in the 1970s and 1980s as an important concept in feminist philosophy and social theory (Naples & Gurr, 2013), muted group theory argues that the dominant members of society, typically men, create a language and system of communication that subvert or reduce other groups, specifically women. Muted group theory has been described as feminist theory, and even this nomenclature is a great example of the claims that the theory is making. The term “feminist” exists in a male-dominated culture and language and connotes a negative conception of that which it is used to describe. Even the fact that there is no popular term used to describe those who fight for the rights and equal status of men points to the fact that there is a problem. The word “feminist” exists because it deviates from what is perceived as the “norm.” Even the terminology we use to describe women, and a theory that calls attention to their subversion, we see as even more subversion.

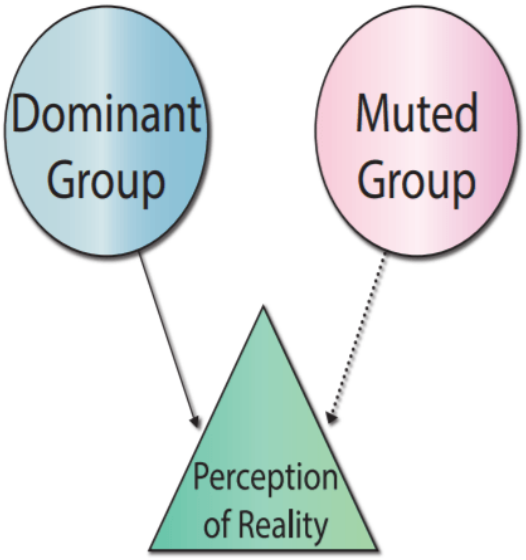


Figure 3.4.3 Muted Group Theory. A diagram featuring two circles that show two sectors of society with arrows pointing downward, indicating their perceptions of reality. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; Wrench, Punyanunt-Carter, Thweatt, via Pressbooks.

Figure 3.4.3 represents the basic conceptualization of muted group theory. The blue circle represents the dominant group, and the solid arrow points to their perception of reality. Meanwhile, the pink circle represents the muted group, and the dashed line represents their perception of reality. Often, what happens in society is that the dominant group's perception of reality is just seen as reality. As such, the muted group's perception of reality is seen as less than or more fanciful than the dominant group's perception. In reality, the muted group often sees things that do exist in a society that the dominant group either cannot see or chooses not to see based on its position in society as the dominant group.

One area in our society where we can examine muted group theory is socioeconomic status. Here are just a few statements overheard at get-togethers of wealthy and higher-income folk.

Example 3.4.1 Overheard at a Party

Scenario: Cheri is a recent college graduate who is paying off her student loans. She is invited to a party in Beverly Hills. Here are some examples of conversations she overhears while at the party:

- "I feel sorry for them, because they have a budget."
- "What do you mean, you don't know if you should get them? Whenever I want new clothes, I just ask my daddy for the money card."
- "Why don't you just buy the car with cash so you don't have to make payments?" The recipient of this comment responds by saying he can't afford to pay for a car in cash. His rich friend replies, "Why don't you just have your parents buy it for you?"
- "If you're making $50,000 and your salary gets down to $40,000 and you have to cut, it's very severe to you. But it's no less severe than these other people with these big numbers."
- "People who don't have money don't understand the stress. Could you imagine what it's like to say I got three kids in private school, I have to think about pulling them out? How do you do that?"
- "You don't get the vote if you don't pay a dollar in taxes. But what I think is that it should be like a corporation. You pay a million dollars, you get a million votes. How's that?"

Impact: This scenario paints a vivid picture of conversations among a wealthy elite, marked by a significant disconnect from the experiences of the broader population. The above conversations play a role in the Muted Group Theory, in terms of different realities for different segments of society.

The perspectives illustrated in these statements are ones that most of us cannot easily relate to. The opposite is also true. People who live in the top 1% often have very flawed perceptions of what life is like for those who don't have piles of money sitting around. Often, those in the dominant group (in this case, the top 1%) have no conceptualization of what life is like for those in

muted groups (the bottom 99%). As such, those in muted groups often have a much clearer perception of reality.

Some research on this theory has been done on other subverted groups, such as new kids at school. They found that it was normative patterns that created a system of subversion in the classroom. When a new student arrived, they inadvertently went against the popular normative habits of the class and, in doing so, ostracized themselves. Other students simultaneously asserted and solidified their dominance while lowering the status of the new student. This same thing can be seen in our male-dominated society. As women seek to make themselves known and heard, they are continually reduced, and male-centric standards are reinforced.

Example 3.4.2 Using the Mute Button, for Some People Only.

Scenario: In her study, Heather Kissack (2010) focused on the subversion and muting of women in email communication within businesses. She found that women are consistently marginalized and muted in organizational emails in the workplace. This is surprising because it would seem that without the nonverbal cues of face-to-face communication, there would be less muting of women in computer-mediated communication. Unfortunately, in this study, one can see that it is the male-centric verbiage that has created this divide in social and organizational status. Even as women attempted to un-mute themselves, they were increasingly muted and subverted.

Impact: The findings from Kissack's study indicate that even within seemingly neutral platforms such as email, where nonverbal communication, such as body language and facial expression, is absent, women's voices are still marginalized to the point of being muted.

Kissack's study illuminates the ongoing resistance with which marginalized groups, such as women or other minorities, are met when they attempt to sound their voices. This research underlines the urgent need for stronger efforts to be made to create equitable communication norms within the workplace, which will eventually trickle down to mainstream society and informal settings. Such norms would include:

- Gender-neutral language
- Active inclusion in email or text threads
- A cultural shift toward more mindful, inclusive, and equitable communication practices.

Key Takeaways

- A person's name significantly influences how others perceive them and can shape their identity, behavior, and emotional experiences.
- Names reflect cultural trends and socioeconomic patterns, often signaling background, social class, and generational influences.
- Names can impact how we perceive others. It can also impact how we feel about ourselves.
- We can increase affiliation with others by converging our language with others. We can decrease affiliation with others by diverging our language from that of others.
- Sexism and racism can be displayed through our language choices. It is important to be aware of the words we use so that we do not come across as sexist or racist.

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3.5: Improving Verbal Communication

Strategies for Communicating Well

So far, in this chapter, we have learned about the importance of language in verbal communication, both written and spoken. In this final section of the chapter, we will look at methods to enhance your verbal communication skills by incorporating some essential tools into your Communicator's Arsenal. To become a great interpersonal communicator, you will want to learn and master three fundamental skills.

How to Become a Great Interpersonal Communicator

To become a great interpersonal communicator, you'll want to master these three skills:

- improving your language, in part by building your vocabulary and reading more
- increasing your awareness and adaptation of language to specific audiences
- checking for understanding

Improving Language

From an early age, you probably had words that you used most frequently because you were familiar with those words. As you get older and become more educated, your vocabulary expands to help you become more successful. Language is used to help express our feelings, intentions, and comprehension of others.[32] An extensive vocabulary is a keen predictor of someone's social status, education, and profession. Whether you like it or not, the words we use and the grammatical structure of how we use those words can impact our standing in school, work, and society. Here are some tips to help you improve your vocabulary.

Use Repetition

First, be sure to use repetition. To become familiar with a word, you need to see it over and over again. Besides, you need to use it in conversations over and over again. The more times you repeat the word, the more likely you will memorize it, and it will become part of your daily repertoire.

Group Similar Words Together

Second, group similar words together. You should never learn vocabulary by looking at a list of words. Think of words as different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It doesn't make sense to look at each piece of the puzzle individually. Rather, you need to fit them together to see the whole picture. The same thing should occur with words. You should memorize words that have similarities in some way. For instance, create a vocabulary around a theme, such as music, or an adjective, such as 'beautiful'.

Build Your Vocabulary

Third, it is essential to make a vocabulary that is personal to you. Vocabulary can be defined as all the words understood by a person or a group of people. As early as four months, a baby can start to distinguish between language sounds and other sounds.

How Quickly Do We Develop Our Language Skills?

According to David Crystal (Crystal, 2006), language acquisition happens quite rapidly:

- By age 2, people can recognize and speak 200 words.
- By age 3, people can recognize and speak about 2000 words

- By age 5, people can recognize and speak about 4,000 words



Figure 3.5.1: A small child reaches toward the photographer and seems to be saying something with a high level of emotion. (CC BY-SA 3.0; MOs810 via Wikimedia Commons)

That means your average infant to toddler is learning three to four new words every day. Infants are hardwired to learn a language. If you want to ensure your child can speak multiple languages, it's best to expose them to multiple languages during this crucial developmental cycle. Even though we start as infants, we continue to improve our vocabulary right through middle age.

How Strong Is Your Vocabulary?

- Most adult native test-takers range from 20,000 to 35,000 words
- Average native test-takers of age 8 already know 10,000 words
- Average native test-takers of age 4 already know 5,000 words
- Adult native test-takers learn almost 1 new word a day until middle age
- Adult test-taker vocabulary growth stops at middle age, 34

As you can see, most native English-speaking adults have fairly substantial vocabularies, but we do see a drop in new language acquisition as people enter their middle age. As such, it's important to keep learning.

One way to keep learning is to find words that have meaning for you. If you have ever heard a story about survival from someone who has gone through something life-changing, they probably used words that touched you and helped you connect to the story. In the same fashion, you should find words that can relate to your story. When we find words that have personal meaning to us, we can use those words more effectively in our vocabulary. The box below indicates some worthy tips for building your vocabulary.

Essential Tips to Build Your Vocabulary

- Keep a journal of words you don't know.
- If you don't know a word, look it up in a dictionary.
- Learn to recognize both Latin and Greek roots of words.
- Play vocabulary games (e.g., anagrams, Boggle, crossword puzzles, Scrabble).
- Make a synonym and antonym word list.
- Take a writing and/or editing course.

Read

Lastly, you should read regularly. It doesn't matter what you read. As long as you are reading, you will probably come across words that you are unfamiliar with. When you do come across a word you don't know, take the time to look it up. This practice is especially important when reading academic works because they are often full of ten-thousand-dollar words. Next time you read and run across a word that you don't know, be sure to find the definition so that you can comprehend what is being said.

We would also recommend reading articles and books that stretch you. Go beyond books such as the *Harry Potter* series, which are written for a middle school reading level. Push your reading abilities, challenge yourself to learn one new word each day.

Increase Your Awareness and Adaptation of Language

After learning to improve your vocabulary, it's also important to increase language awareness and adaptation. When we talk about **language awareness**, we are referring to a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language. For our purposes, we define **language adaptation** as the ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner. As such, it's not just about being aware of language that leads to effective interpersonal interactions, but also our ability to adapt our linguistic choices with different people to maximize the effectiveness of our interpersonal communication.

There are a couple of ways that people can increase their language awareness and adaptation. The first way is to engage in meaningful interpersonal communication with someone different from you. This person can be from a different country or a different region of the country from you. When you speak to someone very different from you, you might notice how they use language differently or how they prefer certain words over others.

Another way might be to watch a foreign film. Check out different international films that have been nominated for an Academy Award. Most of them will be dubbed in English or have English subtitles. Pay attention to how the characters communicate with each other to create meaning. Does it give you an appreciation for how you speak?

Lastly, spend some time with a small child, preferably under the age of five. Pay attention to how the child communicates with you versus others (e.g., their friends, parents/guardians, siblings). Children under five are still acquiring words and learning to talk. When you communicate with someone who has a very limited vocabulary, it might help you see how you can adapt your language so that they will understand you.

Check for Understanding

As a speaker, you want to know that the receiver of your message understood what you said. This concept is also known as checking for understanding, or verifying that what has been said is also understood. Even if a person is smiling and nodding at you when you talk, it does not necessarily mean that they are paying attention to everything. They might be trying to be polite and/or friendly. The best way to check for understanding is to use the acronym: TAP. Think of communication like a tap dance; if you don't hear any tapping, would it be a tap dance? The same thing can be applied to communication. Did you communicate if the other person didn't understand you or get what you were trying to say?

First, the T in TAP means to talk. In other words, you explicitly present all the content. As you are talking, you are also trying to make sure that the other person is listening to you.

Second, the A in TAP stands for ask questions. After you talk to the person, try to ask specific questions. Rather than saying, "Did you hear me?" or "Were you listening, which are both yes/no questions, it would be more beneficial to ask, "What did I just say?" or "What did you hear me say?"

Third, the P in TAP means to be prepared to listen. Listen carefully to what the other person says. It is during this phase that you can see if they understood your message. Was the message correct? What emotions are they displaying after you said the message and asked questions? If we don't ask questions, then we can't be sure that the message was received effectively.

Key Takeaways

- Further, increase awareness (a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language) and adaptation of language (the ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner).

- It's important to remember the three basic steps to ensure understanding: T (talk first), A (ask questions), and P (prepare to listen).
- Effective verbal communication requires both language awareness (being mindful of how language functions) and language adaptation (adjusting your words to fit different people and situations).
- You can improve language awareness and adaptation by interacting with diverse individuals, observing communication in different cultures, and adjusting your language for people with varying vocabulary levels.
- To ensure understanding, use the TAP method: talk clearly, ask specific questions, and prepare to listen carefully to confirm your message was received accurately.

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3.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

In this chapter, we delve into the fundamental aspects of verbal communication, emphasizing the delivery of words, both spoken and written, within specific social and personal contexts. The section introduces the notion that the meaning of a message can vary significantly depending on various factors, which are outlined in several examples.

This section of the text highlights how verbal messages are shaped not just by language itself, but also by the circumstances in which they are delivered and interpreted. A particular focus is placed on written communication in the digital age, especially texting, which has largely replaced traditional handwritten correspondence. The chapter explores how modern tools such as emojis, abbreviations, and texting shorthand affect the tone, clarity, and interpretation of messages. It further examines how generational differences and cultural norms can influence how individuals both encode and decode messages, pointing to the potential for misunderstanding and the importance of awareness in digital communication.

The chapter also introduces the linguistic rules that lay a framework for effective verbal communication, including semantic (word meaning) and syntactic (grammar and structure) rules. These rules provide a structure to help ensure that messages are understood as intended and provide a basis for clarity and impact in both spoken and written communication. The developmental aspect of language is discussed as well, tracing how language use evolves from childhood to adulthood and how it serves different functions across personal and professional contexts.

In the last portion of the chapter, two theoretical frameworks, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and Muted Group Theory, are examined to show how language reflects and shapes cultural perceptions and power dynamics. These theories invite the audience to consider how factors like race, gender, and socioeconomic background influence language usage and access. The chapter concludes by offering practical strategies for improving verbal communication skills, including reading, vocabulary building, and audience adaptation, emphasizing the importance of intentional and inclusive language use in today's interconnected world.

In the next chapter, Nonverbal Communication, we will learn how body language (facial expressions and gestures) can add another layer of meaning, and perhaps even a very different message from the one intended.

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3.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 3

Figure 3.2.2: The Abstraction Ladder

A graphic depicting an image that is split in half. On the left side of the image is a graphic of a ladder. The ladder has six rungs, which ascend upward. The bottom rung of the ladder has the word 'Concrete', next to it, indicating it represents ideas that are very Concrete and easily defined. On the right side of the dividing line, corresponding directly to the word 'Concrete', is the word 'Interpersonal Communication', which is an academic subject. The next higher rung of the ladder corresponds to the words on the right side of the screen, which are: 'Communication Studies', which is the discipline that includes 'Interpersonal Communication'. The third rung up on the ladder corresponds to the words on the right side of the dividing line, which are: 'Humanities and Social Sciences', which indicates the college where the course Interpersonal Communication would be listed. The fourth rung up on the ladder corresponds to the words on the right of the dividing line, which are: 'Academic Fields,' which is a broad umbrella of study. The fifth rung up on the ladder corresponds to the word 'Research', which is broader and more abstract than a concept. And finally, the sixth and top rung of the ladder corresponds to the words 'Information' on the right side of the screen, which is a broad, umbrella concept under which Interpersonal Communication, a very specific course of study, is housed.

Figure 3.2.4: Signifier, Signified, and Referent

A diagram showing an upside-down U. On the left side, at the bottom of the image, is the word 'Dog'. Below the word 'Dog' are the words: 'Word/Symbol and Signifier'. From here, a line points upwards with the word 'Signifier' alongside it. The line then moves to the center, where it intersects with the words: Cuddle Monster/Best Friend. At the same intersection, below the words Cuddle Monster/Best Friend, appear the words Thought/Reference Signified. From this intersection, the line of this upside-down U moves right and points downward. Alongside this line, the words 'Refers to' appear. The line moves to the bottom of the image and ends with a cartoon drawing of a dog, which looks like a beagle. Beneath the dog appears the name 'Teddy.' Below the word 'Teddy' are the words: 'Referent/Object.'

Figure 3.4.3: Muted Group Theory

A diagram featuring a blue circle on the left side of the image that says 'Dominant Group. To the right of the blue circle is a pink circle that says 'Muted Group'. Both circles have lines that point downward and converge in the center with an image of a green triangle with the words 'Perception of Reality' on it. The line from the 'Dominant Group' circle is solid, indicating that the dominant group's perception of reality is seen as reality. By contrast, the line from the 'Muted Group' circle appears as a dashed line, indicating that the muted group's perception of reality is seen as less than, weaker, and more imaginary than the dominant group's perception of reality.

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3.9: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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3.9.1: Exercises

3.2: How Words Work

1. Create an example of an abstraction ladder of how communication can range from general to very specific.
2. Denotative and Connotative Ability. In groups, find ten random words from the dictionary and ask everyone to write down at least five connotations of each of the words. Then, compare your lists. Discuss the similarities and differences between your word choices.
3. Create a metamessages love board. As a class, make a list of all the ways you could tell someone you love them. Then, discuss how your metamessages might cause some misunderstandings or confusion.

3.3: Functions of Language

1. Watch a clip of your favorite TV show and record how many statements are regulatory versus instrumental. Why do you think these differences exist? Do you think it would differ depending on the program? Why?
2. Ask several classmates to describe themselves. Then, randomly read a set of descriptions to another classmate and ask them to identify who this person is. Discover if these personal characteristics are viewed by others or not. Determine why these differences might exist.
3. Create a list of words that exist in English but are not found in other languages. Then, create a list of words that exist in other languages but not in English. Determine why those words might not exist in English or other cultures.

3.4: Types of Language

1. Create a list of names that you have heard that are unique. What makes these names so unique and memorable? Ask friends to give you their perceptions of those names. Does that match what you think? Why or why not?
2. Engage in a normal conversation with a friend or family member. Without having them know what you are doing, slowly and subtly, converge your communication style with theirs. Record your observations. Then, with the same person, try to diverge your communication style. Re-record your observations. Ask if the person noticed any communication changes. How did it make them feel? How did you feel? Why?
3. Make a list of all the words in the English language that are sexist or racist. Try to research those words on the Internet and determine whether these words are sexist or racist. Then, provide alternatives for these words to be more politically correct.

3.5: Improving Verbal Communication

1. Go through the various key terms within this chapter. Did you know all of the definitions before reading this chapter? Which terms did you find difficult to understand? Why?
2. Read a speech from either Vital Speeches of the Day or American Rhetoric. After reading/watching a speech, find a video where the speaker was interviewed. Watch how the speaker sounds when both giving a speech and when answering questions. Analyze the speaker's use of both language awareness and adaptation.
3. Find someone who does not speak English as their first language. During your interaction with that person, put into practice the TAP Method for understanding. How easy was it for you to understand this other person? Why? How did it feel to use the TAP method? Were you effective during your interpersonal interaction? Why?

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3.9.2: Discussion Questions

3.2: How Words Work

1. What is an example of a word that has a positive connotation for some, but perhaps a negative connotation for you?
2. What is an item that has different names in different parts of the United States?
3. Share an instance of when your attitude toward someone changed, and thus the adjectives you use to describe them changed as well.

3.3: Functions of Language

1. Create a list of words that are commonly used in daily life and show them on the board overhead. Invite students to share their thoughts on each word, and if they have an alternative/replacement word for the one shown. This will help the class learn more about Sapir-Whorf's linguistic relativism or linguistic determinism.
2. Discuss whether language is determined by culture or culture is influenced by language. Students will thus argue Linguistic Relativism or Linguistic Determinism.
3. Create a list of words that distinguish between personal, ritual, or cultural.

3.4: Types of Language

1. 'The Story of My Name.'
2. Ask students to share how they got their name.
3. Create a list of words that might be considered biased either by sex or race, and determine ways to make them more biased. Look at examples of groups that might be considered Muted groups or Dominant groups.

3.5: Improving Verbal Communication

1. Make a list of three different methods to improve vocabulary.
2. Recall and share a time when someone misunderstood what you said. What do you think you might have done differently?
3. Discuss why it is important to adapt your language and check for understanding when communicating with different people.

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4: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Overview

Nonverbal communication is a way that we send messages to those around us without ever speaking any words. How? We use our bodies, faces, and even the space around us to send these messages. In this chapter, we will explore the various kinds of nonverbal cues, showing how they often say more than our spoken words. From the way we move and gesture to how we use touch and even the tone of our voice, nonverbal communication is a powerful tool that shapes our interactions and relationships.

We all communicate in every conversation using subtle cues that regulate the flow of our discussions, express our identities, and even influence how we connect with others. By understanding the different aspects of nonverbal communication, like body language, touch behaviors, vocal tones, and even how we use space, we can become more aware of the unspoken messages we send and receive every day. So that we can accurately interpret those nonverbal cues, we will also compare and contrast some of the similarities and differences of nonverbal communication between cultures and genders.

Being a good nonverbal communicator means paying attention to the signals we're sending out and making sure they match our words. It's about using nonverbal cues to build trust, show empathy, and create strong connections with others. Whether it's through mirroring behaviors, decoding hidden emotions, or adapting to cultural differences, a better understanding of the role nonverbal communication plays in our lives can help us navigate social interactions, understand diverse perspectives, and build meaningful relationships.

Chapter Goals

- Define nonverbal communication.
- Compare and contrast verbal communication and nonverbal communication.
- Discuss the principles of nonverbal communication.
- Provide examples of the functions of nonverbal communication.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Adaptors
- Anxiety
- Artifacts
- Channel
- Chronemics
- Civil Inattention
- Contact Cultures
- Cultural Time
- Emblems
- Eye Contact Aversion
- Formal Time
- Friendship-Warmth
- Functional-Professional
- Haptics
- Illustrators
- Immediacy Behaviors
- Informal Time

- Kinesics
- Language Barriers
- Lie Bias
- Love
- Love-Intimacy
- Micro-expressions
- Mirroring
- Monochronic
- Noncontact Cultures
- Nonverbal Cluster
- Nonverbal Congruence
- Nonverbal Leakage
- Oculesics
- Paralanguage
- Personal Space
- Personal Time
- Physical Characteristics
- Physical Attractiveness Bias
- Physical Time
- Pitch
- Polychronic
- Proxemics
- Proxemic Distances
- Public Space
- Self-Adaptors
- Self-Presentation
- Sexual-Arousal Touch
- Social-Polite
- Social Zone
- Speaking Rate
- Spoken Words
- Territoriality
- Tie Signs
- Touch Behaviors
- Truth Bias
- Verbal Fillers
- Vocalics

4.1: Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

4.3: Nonverbal Communication Competence

4.4: Nonverbal Communication in Context

4.5: Chapter Wrap-Up

4.6: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 4

4.7: References

4.8: Teacher Resources

4.8.1: Exercises

4.8.2: Discussion Questions

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4.1: Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Multiple Channels of Communication

In human communication, a **channel** is the sensory route through which a message travels. Verbal communication relies on just one channel, because spoken language is transmitted through sound and picked up by our ears. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, can be taken in by all five of our senses. Much of communication depends on visual and auditory channels; however, meaning may also be transmitted through touch, taste, and smell. Touch is a potent form of nonverbal communication, but taste and smell have received less scholarly attention than the other senses.

To further define nonverbal communication, it is important to distinguish between vocal and nonvocal aspects of communication. Verbal and nonverbal communication include both vocal and nonvocal elements. Table 4.1.1 shows the relationship among vocal, nonvocal, verbal, and nonverbal aspects of communication. A vocal element of verbal communication is **spoken words**, for example, “Come back here.” A vocal element of nonverbal communication is **paralanguage**, which is the vocalized but nonverbal part of a spoken message, such as speaking rate, volume, and **pitch**, which is the perceived highness and lowness of one's voice. Nonvocal elements of verbal communication include the use of unspoken symbols to convey meaning. Writing and American Sign Language (ASL) are nonvocal examples of verbal communication and are not considered nonverbal communication. Nonvocal elements of nonverbal communication include body language such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Gestures are nonvocal and nonverbal, since most of them do not refer to a specific word as written or signed symbols do.

Table 4.1.1: Vocal and Nonvocal Elements of Communication

Message	Verbal Communication	Nonverbal Communication
Vocal	Spoken words	Paralanguage (pitch, volume, speaking rate, etc.)
Nonvocal	Writing, sign language	Body language (gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, etc.)

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication has a distinct history and has evolved separately from verbal communication, due to its unique functions. For example, nonverbal communication is primarily biologically based, while verbal communication is primarily culturally based. This is evidenced by the fact that some nonverbal communication has similar meaning across cultures, while no verbal communication systems share that same universal recognizability (Andersen, 1999). Nonverbal communication also evolved earlier than verbal communication and served an early and important survival function that helped humans later develop verbal communication. While some of our nonverbal communication abilities, like our sense of smell, lost strength as our verbal capacities increased, other abilities, such as paralanguage and movement, have grown alongside verbal complexity. The fact that nonverbal communication is processed by an older part of our brain makes it more instinctual and involuntary than verbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Important Interpersonal and Emotional Messages

You’ve probably heard that more meaning is generated from nonverbal communication than from verbal communication. Some studies have claimed that 90 percent of our meaning is derived from nonverbal signals, but more reliable findings claim that it is closer to 65 percent (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). We may rely more on nonverbal signals in situations where verbal and nonverbal messages conflict and in situations where emotional or relational communication is taking place (Hargie, 2011). In essence, when someone asks a question, and we’re not sure about the “angle” they are taking, we may hone in on nonverbal cues to fill in the meaning.

Below are two different scenarios using the same words, but different nonverbals. When the vocal verbals are the same, but the nonvocal nonverbals are different, does this change the meaning of each message?

Example 4.1.1 Same Words, Different Nonverbals

Scenario: Class has ended, and Shreya and Glenn pack up their belongings to leave class. Glenn asks Shreya:

"What are you doing tonight?"

As he asks this, he leans closer to Shreya, makes direct eye contact, and watches, waiting for her reaction.

Impact: The nonverbal communication of Glenn (fully engaged body language-leaning in closer, direct and prolonged eye contact) seems to indicate a romantic interest in his classmate.

Scenario: Robin and Anita are gym friends who meet on Wednesdays and Fridays for yoga class. Friday class has ended, and as they roll up their yoga mats, Anita glances at her watch, looks around for her other shoe, and asks Robin:

"What are you doing tonight?"

As Anita asks this, she is tying her shoe and casually pushing a strand of hair out of her eyes, and observing her reflection in the floor-length mirrors of the gym's yoga studio.

Impact: The nonverbal communication of Anita (body language shows distraction, not making direct eye contact with Robin, multitasking) seems to indicate only casual interest in her gym friend's life.

We also put more weight on nonverbal communication when determining a person's credibility. For example, if a classmate delivers a speech in class and her verbal content seems well-researched and unbiased, but her nonverbal communication is poor (her voice is monotone, no eye contact, constant fidgeting), she will likely not be viewed as credible. Conversely, in some situations, verbal communication might carry more meaning than nonverbal communication. In interactions where information exchange is the focus, at a briefing at work, for example, verbal communication likely accounts for much more of the meaning generated. Despite this exception, a key principle of nonverbal communication is that it often takes on more meaning in interpersonal and/or emotional exchanges.

The credibility of a person is often more heavily weighted by their use of nonverbal communication over verbal communication. For instance, a classmate may deliver a speech that is thorough, well-researched, and unbiased. However, if the delivery is flat, such as using a monotone voice, avoiding eye contact, and frequently fidgeting instead of using purposeful gestures, the speaker is likely to be perceived as less credible due to their poor nonverbal communication. In contrast, there are situations in which verbal communication carries more weight than nonverbal cues. For example, during a round table discussion, intelligence or security briefings, or political discussions, where the primary goal is exchanging information, it is verbal content that accounts for most of the meaning. Even so, a key principle of nonverbal communication is that it typically plays a stronger role in interpersonal and emotionally driven interactions.



Figure 4.1.1: About 65 percent of the meaning we derive during interactions comes from nonverbal communication. (CC BY 2.0; Gideon via Flickr)

Nonverbal Communication Is More Involuntary

There are some instances in which we verbally communicate involuntarily. These types of exclamations are often verbal responses to a surprising stimulus. For example, we say “Owww!” when we stub our toe or scream “Stop!” when we see someone heading toward danger. Involuntary nonverbal signals are much more common than verbal, and although most nonverbal communication isn’t completely involuntary, it is more below our consciousness than verbal communication and therefore more difficult to control.

Micro-expressions

The involuntary nature of much nonverbal communication makes it more difficult to control or “fake.” For example, although you can consciously smile a little and shake hands with someone when you first see them, it’s difficult to fake that you’re “happy” to meet someone. Nonverbal communication leaks out in ways that expose our underlying thoughts or feelings. These spontaneous, unrehearsed expressions and gestures are known as micro-expressions. **Micro-expressions** are fleeting, involuntary facial expressions that inadvertently slip through when individuals attempt to conceal or repress their genuine feelings. These can manifest as subtle movements of the entire face or as isolated muscle contractions. Through extensive exploration, it has been revealed that specific facial expressions associated with a single emotion can occur within a time frame ranging from 0.5 seconds to 4 seconds. Some may persist throughout the entire face, while others transpire too swiftly to be precisely measured, confirming the existence of micro-expressions. (Yang, 2024)

Have you ever tried to conceal your surprise, suppress your anger, or act joyful even when you weren’t? Most people whose careers don’t involve conscious manipulation of nonverbal signals find it difficult to control or suppress them. While we can consciously decide to stop sending verbal messages, our nonverbal communication always has the potential of generating meaning for another person. The teenager who decides to shut out his dad and not communicate with him still sends a message with his “blank” stare (still a facial expression) and lack of movement (still a gesture). In this sense, nonverbal communication is “irrepressible” (Andersen, 1999).

Spokespeople, lawyers, or other public representatives who are the “face” of a politician, celebrity, corporation, or organization must learn to control their facial expressions and other nonverbal communication so they can effectively convey the message of their employer or client without having their personal thoughts and feelings leak through. Poker players, therapists, police officers, doctors, teachers, and actors are also in professions that often require them to have more awareness of and control over their nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication is More Ambiguous

Verbal Communication can consist of several factors that contribute to message ambiguity and potential misunderstandings; however, nonverbal communication is even more ambiguous. As with verbal communication, most of our nonverbal signals can be linked to multiple meanings, but unlike words, many nonverbal signals do not have any one specific meaning. If you've ever had someone wink at you and didn't know why, you've probably experienced this uncertainty. Did they wink to express their affection for you, their pleasure with something you just did, or because you share some inside knowledge or joke?

Just as we look at context clues in a sentence or paragraph to derive meaning from a particular word, we can look for context clues in various sources of information, like the physical environment, other nonverbal signals, or verbal communication, to make sense of a particular nonverbal cue. Unlike verbal communication, however, nonverbal communication doesn't have explicit rules of grammar that bring structure, order, and agreed-on patterns of usage. Instead, we implicitly learn norms of nonverbal communication, which leads to greater variance. In general, we exhibit more idiosyncrasies in our usage of nonverbal communication than we do with verbal communication, which also increases the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication is More Credible

Although we can rely on verbal communication to fill in the blanks sometimes left by nonverbal expressions, we often put more trust in what people do over what they say. This is especially true in times of stress or danger when our behaviors become more instinctual, and we rely on older systems of thinking and acting that evolved before our ability to speak and write (Andersen, 1999). This innateness creates intuitive feelings about the genuineness of nonverbal communication, and this genuineness relates to our earlier discussion about the sometimes involuntary and often subconscious nature of nonverbal communication. An example of the innateness of nonverbal signals can be found in children who have been blind since birth but still exhibit the same facial expressions as other children. In short, the involuntary or subconscious nature of nonverbal communication makes it less easy to fake, which makes it seem more honest and credible. We will learn more about the role that nonverbal communication plays in deception later in this chapter.

Functions of Nonverbal Communication

A primary function of nonverbal communication is to convey meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication. Nonverbal communication is also used to influence others and regulate conversational flow. Perhaps even more important are how nonverbal communication functions as a central part of relational communication and identity expression.

Three Ways That Nonverbal Communication Conveys Meaning

Nonverbal communication conveys meaning by: reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication. As we've already learned, verbal and nonverbal communication are two parts of the same system that often work side by side, helping us generate meaning.

Nonverbal Communication By Reinforcing

In terms of reinforcing verbal communication, gestures can help describe a space or shape that another person is unfamiliar with in ways that words alone cannot. Gestures also reinforce basic meaning—for example, pointing to the door when you tell someone to leave. Facial expressions reinforce the emotional states we convey through verbal communication. For example, smiling while telling a funny story better conveys your emotions (Hargie, 2011). Vocal variation can help us emphasize a particular part of a message, which helps reinforce a word or sentence's meaning. For example, saying "How was *your* weekend?" conveys a different meaning than saying "How was your *weekend*?"

Nonverbal Communication By Substituting

Nonverbal communication can substitute for verbal communication in a variety of ways. Nonverbal communication can convey much meaning when verbal communication isn't effective because of language barriers. **Language barriers** are present when a person hasn't yet learned to speak or loses the ability to speak.

Example 4.1.2 Babies Communicate Nonverbally

Scenario: Grace, a nervous new mother, goes to her baby daughter Chloe's crib, and sees that Chloe is awake with an expression of discomfort on her little face. Her nose is pink and wrinkled as if she is unhappy about something. Grace registers that Chloe needs to be changed. She gently picks up her daughter and changes the diaper, which was indeed in need of changing. After a few moments of play, she sets Chloe back down in her crib, and Chloe smiles and coos for a few moments before drifting off to sleep.

Impact: Babies who have not yet developed language skills make facial expressions at a few months old that are similar to those of adults and therefore can generate meaning (Oster, Hegley, & Nagel, 1992).

People who cannot use spoken language, such as infants, individuals with undeveloped or impaired language skills, or those who temporarily or permanently lose language, can still communicate nonverbally. This is also true when people speak different languages, such as in cross-cultural situations. While learning the local language is helpful when traveling, basic gestures like pointing or showing size and shape are often enough for simple communication.

Nonverbal communication is also useful in a quiet situation where verbal communication would be disturbing; for example, you may use a gesture to signal to a friend that you're ready to leave the library. Crowded or loud places can also impede verbal communication and lead people to rely more on nonverbal messages. Getting a server or bartender's attention with a hand gesture is definitely more polite than yelling, "Hey, dude!" There are also times when it's just better not to say something aloud. If you want to point out a person's unusual outfit or signal to a friend that you think his or her date is weird, you're more likely to do that nonverbally, at least at the beginning.

Nonverbal Communication By Contradicting

Nonverbal communication can convey meaning by contradicting verbal communication. As we learned earlier, we often perceive nonverbal communication to be more credible than verbal communication. This is especially true when we receive mixed messages or messages in which verbal and nonverbal signals contradict each other. For example, a person may say, "You can't do anything right!" in a mean tone but follow that up with a wink, which could indicate the person is teasing or joking. Mixed messages lead to uncertainty and confusion on the part of receivers, which leads us to look for more information to try to determine which message is more credible. If we are unable to resolve the discrepancy, we are likely to react negatively and potentially withdraw from the interaction (Hargie, 2011). Persistent mixed messages can lead to relational distress and hurt a person's credibility in professional settings.



Figure 4.1.2: We send mixed messages when our verbal and nonverbal communication contradict each other. If this woman said she was excited about seeing you, would you believe her? (CC BY-NC 2.0; Bored via Flickr)

Nonverbal Communication Influences Others

Nonverbal communication can be used to influence people in a variety of ways, but the most common way is through deception. Deception is typically thought of as the intentional act of altering information to influence another person, which means that it extends beyond lying to include concealing, omitting, or exaggerating information. While verbal communication is to blame for the content of the deception, nonverbal communication partners with the language through deceptive acts to be more convincing. Since most of us intuitively believe that nonverbal communication is more credible than verbal communication, we often intentionally try to control our nonverbal communication when we are engaging in deception. Likewise, we try to evaluate other people's nonverbal communication to determine the veracity of their messages. Students initially seem surprised when we discuss the prevalence of deception, but their surprise diminishes once they realize that deception isn't always malevolent, mean, or hurtful. Deception obviously has negative connotations, but people engage in deception for many reasons, including to excuse their own mistakes, to be polite to others, or to influence others' behaviors or perceptions.

The fact that deception served an important evolutionary purpose helps explain its prevalence among humans today. Species that are capable of deception have a higher survival rate. Other animals engage in nonverbal deception that helps them attract mates, hide from predators, and trap prey (Andersen, 1999). To put it bluntly, the better at deception a creature is, the more likely it is to survive. So, over time, the humans who were better liars were the ones who got their genes passed on. But the fact that lying played a part in our survival as a species doesn't give us a license to lie.

Aside from deception, we can use nonverbal communication to "take the edge off" a critical or unpleasant message in an attempt to influence the reaction of the other person. We can also use eye contact and proximity to get someone to move or leave an area. For example, hungry diners waiting to snag a 'first-come, first-served' spot in a crowded restaurant send messages to the people who have already eaten and paid that it's time to go. People on competition reality television shows play what they've come to term as a "social game." The social aspects of the game involve the manipulation of verbal and nonverbal cues to send strategic messages about oneself in an attempt to influence others. Nonverbal cues such as length of conversational turn, volume, posture, touch, eye contact, and choices of clothing and accessories can become part of a player's social game strategy. Although reality television isn't a reflection of real life, people still engage in competition and strategically change their communication to influence others, making it important to be aware of how we nonverbally influence others and how they may try to influence us.

Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversational Flow

Conversational interaction has been likened to a dance, where each person has to make moves and take turns without stepping on the other's toes. Nonverbal communication helps us regulate our conversations so we don't end up constantly interrupting each other or waiting in awkward silences between speaker turns. Pitch, which is a part of vocalics, helps us cue others into our conversational intentions. A rising pitch typically indicates a question, and a falling pitch indicates the end of a thought or the end of a conversational turn. We can also use a falling pitch to indicate closure, which can be very useful at the end of a speech to signal to the audience that you are finished, which cues the applause and prevents an awkward silence that the speaker ends up filling with "That's it" or "Thank you." We also signal our turn is coming to an end by stopping hand gestures and shifting our eye contact to the person who we think will speak next (Hargie, 2011). Conversely, we can "hold the floor" with nonverbal signals even when we're not exactly sure what we're going to say next. Repeating a hand gesture or using one or more verbal fillers can extend our turn even though we are not verbally communicating at the moment.

Nonverbal Communication Affects Relationships

To successfully relate to other people, we must possess some skill at encoding and decoding nonverbal communication. The nonverbal messages we send and receive influence our relationships in positive and negative ways and can work to bring people together or push them apart. Nonverbal communication in the form of tie signs, immediacy behaviors, and expressions of emotion are just three of many examples that illustrate how nonverbal communication affects our relationships.

Tie signs are nonverbal cues that communicate intimacy and signal the connection between two people. These relational indicators can be objects such as wedding rings or tattoos that are symbolic of another person or the relationship, actions such as sharing the same drinking glass, or touch behaviors such as hand-holding (Afifi & Johnson, 2005). **Touch behaviors** are the most frequently studied tie signs and can communicate much about a relationship based on the area being touched, the length of time, and the intensity of the touch. Kisses and hugs, for example, are considered tie signs, but a kiss on the cheek is different from a kiss on the mouth, and a full embrace is different from a half embrace. If you consider yourself a "people watcher," take note of the various tie signs you see people use and what they might say about the relationship.

Immediacy behaviors play a central role in bringing people together and have been identified by some scholars as the most important function of nonverbal communication (Andersen & Andersen, 2005). **Immediacy behaviors** are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators and include things like smiling, nodding, making eye contact, and occasionally engaging in social, polite, or professional touch (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007). Immediacy behaviors are a good way of creating rapport, or a friendly and positive connection between people. Skilled nonverbal communicators are more likely to be able to create rapport with others due to attention-getting expressiveness, warm initial greetings, and an ability to get "in tune" with others, which conveys empathy (Riggio, 1992). These skills are important to help initiate and maintain relationships.

While verbal communication is our primary tool for solving problems and providing detailed instructions, nonverbal communication is our primary tool for communicating emotions. This makes sense when we remember that nonverbal communication emerged before verbal communication and was the channel through which we expressed anger, fear, and love for thousands of years of human history (Andersen, 1999). Touch and facial expressions are two primary ways we express emotions nonverbally. **Love** is a primary emotion that we express nonverbally, and that forms the basis of our close relationships. Although no single facial expression for love has been identified, it is expressed through prolonged eye contact, close interpersonal distances, increased touch, and increased time spent together, among other things. Given many people's limited emotional vocabulary, nonverbal expressions of emotion are central to our relationships.

Think About This 4.1.1 "Getting Real": Teachers and Immediacy Behaviors

Research shows the importance of teachers' use of immediacy behaviors in educational settings (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal actions that reduce physical or psychological distance between communicators and positively influence student learning, teacher evaluations, and teacher–student relationships (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007). Research consistently shows that effective use of immediacy behaviors enhances learning across different contexts and levels, while also leading to more favorable student evaluations, which can impact a teacher's career. Students often form quick judgments about teachers based on nonverbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, and movement, which shape perceptions of credibility, confidence, and approachability. Although commonly studied in teaching, immediacy behaviors are also valuable in other interpersonal settings, including workplaces, sales, and politics. The following are examples of immediacy behaviors that can be effectively used by teachers:

- Moving around the classroom during class activities, lectures, and discussions (reduces physical distance)
- Keeping the line of sight open between the teacher's body and the students by avoiding or only briefly standing behind lecterns/computer tables or sitting behind a desk while directly interacting with students (reduces physical distance)
- Being expressive and animated with facial expressions, gestures, and voice (demonstrates enthusiasm)
- Smiling (creates a positive and open climate)
- Making frequent eye contact with students (communicates attentiveness and interest)
- Calling students by name (reduces perceived psychological distance)
- Making appropriate self-disclosures to students about personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences (reduces perceived psychological distance, creates an open climate)

Teachers who are judged as less immediate are more likely to sit, touch their heads, shake instead of nod their heads, use sarcasm, avoid eye contact, and use less expressive nonverbal behaviors. Finally, immediacy behaviors affect the teacher-student relationship. Immediacy behaviors help establish rapport, which is a personal connection that increases students' investment in the class and material, increases motivation, increases communication between teacher and student, increases liking, creates a sense of mutual respect, reduces challenging behavior by students, and reduces anxiety.

Nonverbal Communication Expresses Our Identities

Nonverbal communication expresses who we are. Our identities (the groups to which we belong, our cultures, our hobbies and interests, etc.) are conveyed nonverbally through the way we set up our living and working spaces, the clothes we wear, the way we carry ourselves, and the accents and tones of our voices. Our physical bodies give others impressions about who we are, and some of these features are more under our control than others. Height, for example, has been shown to influence how people are treated and perceived in various contexts. Our level of attractiveness also influences our identities and how people perceive us. Although we can temporarily alter our height or looks—for example, with different shoes or different color contact lenses—we can only permanently alter these features using more invasive and costly measures such as cosmetic surgery. We have more control over some other aspects of nonverbal communication in terms of how we communicate our identities. For example, the way we

carry and present ourselves through posture, eye contact, and tone of voice can be altered to present ourselves as warm or distant depending on the context.

Aside from our physical body, artifacts, which are the objects and possessions that surround us, also communicate our identities. Examples of artifacts include our clothes, jewelry, and space decorations. In all the previous examples, implicit norms or explicit rules can affect how we nonverbally present ourselves. For example, in a particular workplace, it may be a norm (implicit) for people in management positions to dress casually, or it may be a rule (explicit) that different levels of employees wear different uniforms or follow particular dress codes. We can also use nonverbal communication to express identity characteristics that do not match up with who we actually think we are. Through changes to nonverbal signals, a capable person can try to appear helpless, a guilty person can try to appear innocent, or an uninformed person can try to appear credible.

Key Takeaways

- When humans communicate, all of our communication flows through a channel.
- Nonverbal communication operates on the following principles: it typically conveys more meaning than verbal communication, is more involuntary than verbal communication, is often more ambiguous than verbal communication, and is often perceived as more credible than verbal communication.
- Nonverbal communication affects verbal communication in that it can complement, reinforce, substitute, or contradict verbal messages.
- Nonverbal communication regulates conversational flow, as it provides important cues that signal the beginning and end of conversational turns and facilitate the beginning and end of an interaction.
- Nonverbal communication expresses our identities, as who we are is conveyed through the way we set up our living and working spaces, the clothes we wear, our personal presentation, and the tones in our voices.

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4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

Body Language

Just as verbal language is broken up into various categories, there are also different types of nonverbal communication. These different forms of nonverbal communication often work together to reinforce, modify, or contradict the verbal message being conveyed.

Kinesics

The word **kinesics** comes from the root word *kinesis*, which means “movement,” and refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and face movements. This section outlines the use of gestures, head movements, posture, eye contact, and facial expressions as nonverbal communication.

Gestures

There are three main types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators (Andersen, 1999). **Adaptors** are behaviors and movements that involve touch and often indicate a speaker's mental and emotional state. Adaptors can be targeted toward the self, objects, or others. In regular social situations, adaptors result from uneasiness, anxiety, or a general sense that one is not in control of one's surroundings. Many of us subconsciously touch our hair, shake our legs, and blindly scroll on our phones during class, activities, meetings, or while waiting for an appointment, simply as a way to do something with our excess energy.

Common self-touching behaviors like scratching, twirling hair, or fidgeting with fingers or hands are considered **self-adaptors**. Some self-adaptors manifest internally, as coughs or throat-clearing sounds. Some people use object adaptors, such as note cards, keychain dolls, accessories, or the lectern mic. Use of object adaptors can also signal boredom as people play with the straw in their drink or peel the label off a bottle of beer. Smartphones have become common object adaptors, as people can fiddle with their phones to help ease anxiety. Finally, as noted, other adaptors are more common in social situations than in public speaking situations, given the speaker’s distance from audience members. Other adaptors involve adjusting or grooming others, similar to how primates like chimpanzees pick things off each other. It would definitely be strange for a speaker to approach an audience member and pick lint off his or her sweater, fix a crooked tie, tuck a tag in, or pat down a flyaway hair in the middle of a speech.

Emblems are gestures that have a specific, agreed-upon meaning. These are still different from the signs used by hearing-impaired people or others who communicate using American Sign Language (ASL). Even though they have a generally agreed-upon meaning, they are not part of a formal sign system like ASL that is explicitly taught to a group of people. A hitchhiker’s raised thumb, the “OK” sign with thumb and index finger connected in a circle with the other three fingers sticking up, and the raised middle finger are all examples of emblems that have an agreed-on meaning or meanings within a culture. Emblems can be still or in motion; for example, circling the index finger around at the side of your head says “He or she is crazy,” or rolling your hands over and over in front of you says “Move on.”



Figure 4.2.1: Emblems are gestures that have a specific meaning. In the United States, a thumbs-up can mean “I need a ride” or “OK!”. In other countries, it might have a very different, agreed-upon meaning. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Thumbs Up via Flickr)

Just as we can trace the history of a word, or its etymology, we can also trace some nonverbal signals, especially emblems, to their origins. Holding up the index and middle fingers in a “V” shape with the palm facing in is an insult gesture in Britain that basically means “up yours.” This gesture dates back centuries to the period in which the primary weapon of war was the bow and arrow. When archers were captured, their enemies would often cut off these two fingers, which was seen as the ultimate insult and worse than being executed, since the archer could no longer shoot his bow and arrow. Holding up two fingers was a provoking gesture used by archers to show their enemies that they still had their shooting fingers (Pease & Pease, 2004).

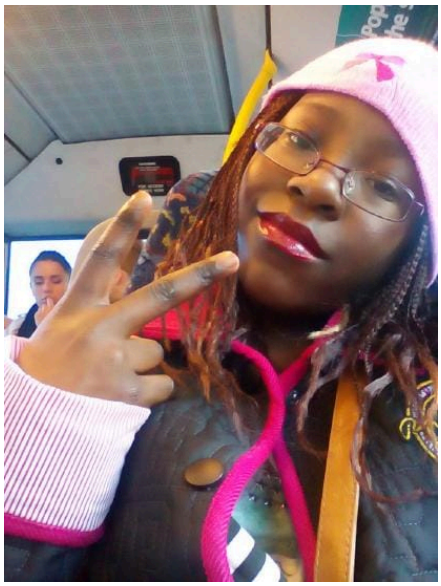


Figure 4.2.2: Holding up the index and middle fingers in a “V” shape with the palm facing in is an insulting gesture in the UK. In the United States, the same gesture symbolizes 'Goodbye' or 'Peace Out'. The meaning of this gesture has evolved over time and across cultures. (CC BY SA 3.0; NickyKushonga 123 via Wikimedia Commons)

Illustrators are the most common type of gesture and are used to illustrate the verbal message they accompany. For example, you might use hand gestures to indicate the size or shape of an object. Unlike emblems, illustrators do not typically have inherent meaning and are used more subconsciously than emblems. These largely involuntary and seemingly natural gestures flow from us as we speak, but vary in terms of intensity and frequency based on context. Although we are never explicitly taught how to use illustrative gestures, we do it automatically. Think about how you still gesture when having an animated conversation on the phone, even though the other person can’t see you.

Head Movements and Posture

Head movements and posture can be grouped because they are often both used to acknowledge others and communicate interest or attentiveness. In terms of head movements, a head nod is often a sign of acknowledgement in cultures where the formal bow is no longer used as a greeting. In these cases, the head nod essentially serves as an abbreviated bow. An innate head movement is the head shake back and forth to signal “no.” This nonverbal signal begins at birth, even before a baby can know that it has a corresponding meaning. Babies shake their head from side to side to reject their mother’s breast and later shake their head to reject attempts to spoon-feed (Pease & Pease, 2004). This biologically based movement then sticks with us to be a recognizable signal for “no.” We also move our head to indicate interest. For example, a head up typically indicates an engaged or neutral attitude, a head tilt indicates interest and is an innate submission gesture that exposes the neck and subconsciously makes people feel more trusting of us, and a head down signals a negative or aggressive attitude (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Though widely recognized with the same meanings, the head nod to indicate 'yes' and the head shake to indicate 'no' are not, however, universal. In Bulgaria, for example, a nod means the opposite of agreement; rather, a head nod in Bulgaria indicates disagreement, while shaking the head from side to side indicates agreement (Moretti, Greco, Andonova, & Giagtzidou, 2020). India has a somewhat similar gesture for agreement, which can be a side-to-side shaking of the head, or a "head bobble," which is similar to making the infinity sign with one's head.



Figure 4.2.3: Nodding and shaking one's head can mean different things, in different cultures. In countries like India, a side-to-side head shake, or head wobble, means 'yes' or agreement. (CC BY 2.0; John Hoey via Wikimedia Commons)

There are four general human postures: standing, sitting, squatting, and lying down (Hargie, 2011). Within each of these postures, there are many variations, and when combined with particular gestures or other nonverbal cues, they can express many different meanings. Most of our communication occurs while we are standing or sitting. One interesting standing posture involves putting our hands on our hips, and is a nonverbal cue that we use subconsciously to make us look bigger and show assertiveness. When the elbows are pointed out, this prevents others from getting past us as easily and is a sign of attempted dominance or a gesture that says we’re ready for action. In terms of sitting, leaning back shows informality and indifference, straddling a chair is a sign of dominance (but also some insecurity because the person is protecting the vulnerable front part of his or her body), and leaning forward shows interest and attentiveness (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Eye Contact

We also communicate through eye behaviors, primarily eye contact. While eye behaviors are often studied under the category of kinesics, they have their own branch of nonverbal studies called **oculesics**, which comes from the Latin word *oculus*, meaning “eye.” The face and eyes are the main point of focus during communication, and along with our ears, our eyes take in most of the communicative information around us. The saying “The eyes are the window to the soul” is actually accurate in terms of where people typically think others are “located,” which is right behind the eyes (Andersen, 1999).

Eye contact serves several communicative functions, ranging from regulating interaction to monitoring interaction to conveying

information to establishing interpersonal connections. In terms of regulating communication, we use eye contact to signal to others that we are ready to speak, or we use it to cue others to speak. I'm sure we've all been in that awkward situation where a teacher asks a question, no one else offers a response, and he or she looks directly at us as if to say, "What do you think?" In that case, the teacher's eye contact is used to cue us to respond. During an interaction, eye contact also changes as we shift from speaker to listener. US Americans typically shift eye contact while speaking—looking away from the listener and then looking back at his or her face every few seconds. Toward the end of our speaking turn, we make more direct eye contact with our listener to indicate that we are finishing up. While listening, we tend to make more sustained eye contact, not glancing away as regularly as we do while speaking (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Aside from regulating conversations, eye contact is also used to monitor interaction by taking in feedback and other nonverbal cues and to send information. A speaker can use his or her eye contact to determine if an audience is engaged, confused, or bored and then adapt his or her message accordingly. Our eyes also send information to others. People know not to interrupt when we are in deep thought because we naturally look away from others when we are processing information.

Eye contact can also be used to intimidate others. We have social norms about how much eye contact we make with people, and those norms vary depending on the setting and the person. Staring at another person in some contexts could communicate intimidation, while in other contexts it could communicate flirtation. As we learned, eye contact is a key immediacy behavior, and it signals to others that we are available for communication. Once communication begins, if it does, eye contact helps establish rapport or connection. We can also use our eye contact to signal that we do not want to make a connection with others. For example, in a public setting like an airport or a gym where people often make small talk, we can avoid making eye contact with others to indicate that we do not want to engage in small talk with strangers.



Figure 4.2.4: Eye contact can be used to intimidate others. Actor Al Pacino, seen here in the 1973 film 'Serpico,' often used a cold stare in his roles to intimidate his on-screen adversaries. (Public Domain; eBay via Wikimedia Commons)

Eye contact has many functions in nonverbal communication. Below are a few ways to use eye contact.

Specific Functions of Eye Contact

This list reviews the specific functions of eye contact:

- Regulate interaction and provide turn-taking signals.
- Monitor communication by receiving nonverbal communication from others
- Signal cognitive activity (we look away when processing information)
- Express engagement (we show people we are listening with our eyes)
- Convey intimidation
- Express flirtation
- Establish rapport or connection

Pupil dilation is a subtle component of oculesics that doesn't get as much scholarly attention in communication as eye contact does. Pupil dilation refers to the expansion and contraction of the black part of the center of our eyes and is considered a biometric form of measurement; it is involuntary and therefore seen as a valid and reliable form of data collection as opposed to self-reports on surveys or interviews that can be biased or misleading. Our pupils dilate when there is a lack of lighting and contract when light is plentiful (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). Pain, sexual attraction, general arousal, anxiety/stress, and information processing (thinking) also affect pupil dilation. Researchers measure pupil dilation for several reasons. For example, advertisers use pupil dilation as an indicator of consumer preferences, assuming that more dilation indicates arousal and attraction to a product. We don't consciously read others' pupil dilation in our everyday interactions, but experimental research has shown that we subconsciously perceive pupil dilation, which affects our impressions and communication. In general, dilated pupils increase a person's attractiveness. Even though we may not be aware of this subtle nonverbal signal, we have social norms and practices that may be subconsciously based on pupil dilation. Take, for example, the notion of mood lighting and the common practice of creating a "romantic" ambiance with candlelight or the light from a fireplace. Softer and more indirect light leads to pupil dilation, and although we intentionally manipulate lighting to create a romantic ambiance, not to dilate our pupils, the dilated pupils are still subconsciously perceived, which increases perceptions of attraction (Andersen, 1999).

Facial Expressions

Our faces are the most expressive part of our bodies. Think of how photos are often intended to capture a particular expression "in a flash" to preserve for later viewing. Even though a photo is a snapshot in time, we can still interpret much meaning from a human face caught in a moment of expression, and basic facial expressions are recognizable by humans all over the world. Much research has supported the universality of a core group of facial expressions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust. The first four are especially identifiable across cultures (Andersen, 1999). However, the triggers for these expressions and the cultural and social norms that influence their displays are still culturally diverse. If you've spent much time with babies, you know that they're capable of expressing all these emotions. Getting to see the pure and innate expressions of joy and surprise on a baby's face is what makes playing peek-a-boo so entertaining for adults. As we get older, we learn and begin to follow display rules for facial expressions and other signals of emotion, and also learn to better control our emotional expression based on the norms of our culture.

Smiles are powerful communicative signals and, as you'll recall, are a key immediacy behavior. Although facial expressions are typically viewed as innate and several are universally recognizable, they are not always connected to an emotional or internal biological stimulus; they can actually serve a more social purpose. For example, most of the smiles we produce are primarily made for others and are not just an involuntary reflection of an internal emotional state (Andersen, 1999). These social smiles, however, are slightly but perceptibly different from more genuine smiles. People generally perceive smiles as more genuine when the other person smiles "with their eyes." This particular type of smile is difficult, if not impossible, to fake because the muscles around the eye that are activated when we spontaneously or genuinely smile are not under our voluntary control. It is the involuntary and spontaneous contraction of these muscles that moves the skin around our cheeks, eyes, and nose to create a smile that's distinct from a fake or polite smile (Evans, 2001). People can distinguish the difference between these smiles, which is why photographers often engage in cheesy joking with adults or use props with children to induce a genuine smile before they snap a picture.

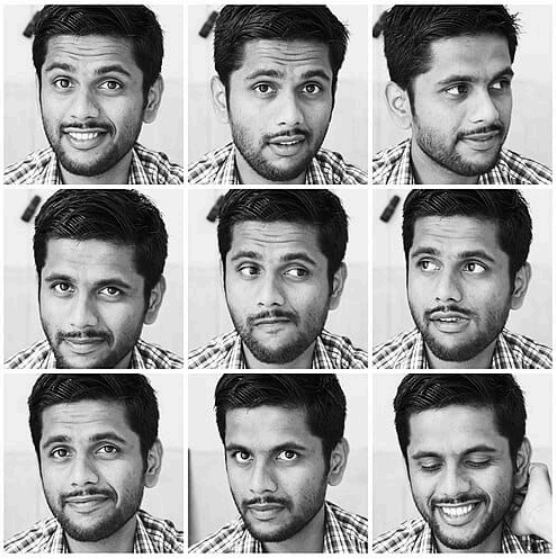


Figure 4.2.5: A collage of a man displaying various emotions, some genuine, some fake. Photographers often joke with their subjects to induce genuine smiles before snapping their pictures (CC BY SA 4.0; Kuiperbharat Wikimedia Commons)

Facial expressions help set the emotional tone for a speech. In order to set a positive tone before you start speaking, briefly look at the audience and smile to communicate friendliness, openness, and confidence. Beyond your opening and welcoming facial expressions, facial expressions communicate a range of emotions and can be used to infer personality traits and make judgments about a speaker's credibility and competence. Facial expressions can communicate that a speaker is tired, excited, angry, confused, frustrated, sad, confident, smug, shy, or bored. Even if you aren't bored, for example, a slack face with little animation may lead an audience to think that you are bored with your own speech, which isn't likely to motivate them to be interested. So make sure your facial expressions are communicating an emotion, mood, or personality trait that you think your audience will view favorably, and that will help you achieve your speech goals. Also, make sure your facial expressions match the content of your speech. When delivering something light-hearted or humorous, a smile, bright eyes, and slightly raised eyebrows will nonverbally enhance your verbal message. When delivering something somber, a furrowed brow, a tighter mouth, and even a slight head nod can enhance that message. If your facial expressions and speech content are not consistent, your audience could become confused by the mixed messages, which could lead them to question your honesty and credibility.

Haptics

Think of how touch has the power to comfort someone in a moment of sorrow when words alone cannot. This positive power of touch is countered by the potential for touch to be threatening because of its connection to sex and violence. To learn about the power of touch, we turn to **haptics**, which refers to the study of communication by touch. We probably get more explicit advice and instruction on how to use touch than any other form of nonverbal communication. A lack of nonverbal communication competence related to touch could have negative interpersonal consequences; for example, if we don't follow the advice we've been given about the importance of a firm handshake, a person might make negative judgments about our confidence or credibility. A lack of competence could have more dire negative consequences, including legal punishment, if someone is touched inappropriately (intentionally or unintentionally). Touch is necessary for human social development, and it can be welcoming, threatening, or persuasive. Research projects have found that students evaluated a library and its staff more favorably if the librarian briefly touched the patron while returning his or her library card, that female restaurant servers received larger tips when they touched patrons, and that people were more likely to sign a petition when the petitioner touched them during their interaction (Andersen, 1999).

Different Types of Touch

There are several types of touch, including functional-professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, love-intimacy, and sexual-arousal touch (Heslin & Apler, 1983). At the **functional-professional** level, touch is related to a goal or part of a routine professional interaction, which makes it less threatening and more expected. For example, we let barbers, hairstylists, doctors, nurses, tattoo artists, and security screeners touch us in ways that would otherwise be seen as intimate or inappropriate if not in a professional context. At the **social-polite** level, socially sanctioned touching behaviors help initiate interactions and show

that others are included and respected. A handshake, a pat on the arm, and a pat on the shoulder are examples of social-polite touching. A handshake is actually an abbreviated hand-holding gesture, but we know that prolonged hand-holding would be considered too intimate and therefore inappropriate at the functional-professional or social-polite level. At the functional-professional and social-polite levels, touch still has interpersonal implications. The touch, although professional and not intimate, between hair stylist and client, or between nurse and patient, has the potential to be therapeutic and comforting. In addition, a social-polite touch exchange plays into initial impression formation, which can have important implications for how an interaction and a relationship unfold.

Of course, touch is also important at more intimate levels. At the **friendship-warmth** level, touch is more important and more ambiguous than at the social-polite level. At this level, touch interactions are important because they serve a relational maintenance purpose and communicate closeness, liking, care, and concern. The types of touching at this level also vary greatly, from more formal and ritualized to more intimate, which means friends must sometimes negotiate their own comfort level with various types of touch and may encounter some ambiguity if their preferences don't match up with their relational partner's. In a friendship, for example, too much touch can signal sexual or romantic interest, and too little touch can signal distance or unfriendliness. At the **love-intimacy** level, touch is more personal and is typically only exchanged between significant others, such as best friends, close family members, and romantic partners. Touching faces, holding hands, and full frontal embraces are examples of touch at this level. Although this level of touch is not sexual, it does enhance feelings of closeness and intimacy and can lead to **sexual-arousal touch,** which is the most intimate form of touch, as it is intended to physically stimulate another person.

Touch is also used in many other contexts—for example, during play (e.g., arm wrestling), during physical conflict (e.g., slapping), and during conversations (e.g., to get someone's attention) (Jones, 1999). We also inadvertently send messages through accidental touch (e.g., bumping into someone).



Figure 4.2.6: A couple on a date relaxing together. What type of touch behaviors are present in this photo? (CC BY SA 2.0; Adam Jones via Wikimedia Commons)

During a first date or less formal initial interactions, quick, fleeting touches indicate interest. For example, a pat on the back is an abbreviated hug (Andersen,1999). In general, the presence or absence of touching cues us into people's emotions. So as the daters sit across from each other, one person may lightly tap the other's arm after he or she said something funny. If the daters are sitting side by side, one person may cross his or her legs and lean toward the other person so that each person's knees or feet occasionally touch. Touching behavior as a way to express feelings is often reciprocal. A light touch from the other will follow a light touch from one dater to indicate that the first touch was OK. While verbal communication could also be used to indicate romantic interest, many people feel too vulnerable at this early stage in a relationship to put something out there in words. If your date advances a touch and you are not interested, it is also unlikely that you will come right out and say, "Sorry, but I'm not really interested." Instead, due to common politeness rituals, you would be more likely to respond with other forms of nonverbal communication, like scooting back, crossing your arms, or simply not acknowledging the touch.

Think About This 4.2.1 What Does Your Hug Say About You?

Hugs can communicate a lot, even when they feel obligatory. A limp or weak hug can signal anger, ambivalence, or annoyance. Different types of hugs convey different levels of intimacy. The crisscross hug, common among friends, family, and partners, involves arms crossing above or below each other. The neck-waist hug, or "slow-dance hug," is more intimate, with one person's arms around the neck and the other's around the waist. The engulfing hug, similar to a bear hug, is spontaneous and shows excitement.

Some hugs are less intimate and more common among men, such as the "shake-first-then-tap hug" and the back-slap hug. The shake-first-then-tap hug starts with a modified handshake followed by a brief hug, minimizing torso contact due to cultural norms limiting men's physical affection. The back-slap hug involves repeated pats on the back, often during conversation, and can indicate when one person wants to end the hug. A notable example is the footage of Bill Clinton hugging Monica Lewinsky, which emerged as allegations that they had an affair were being investigated, showing her holding on, while he was tapping from the beginning of the hug.

Next time you meet someone, pay close attention to the manner in which you greet them.

1. Do you feel comfortable hugging them?
2. What do you notice about the way that you hug them?

Sometimes, the question of what level of touch is permissible, when it comes to community safety, becomes a primary concern. Do privacy laws protect us when it comes to travel safety and the greater good?

Think About This 4.2.2 Airport Security Pat-Downs: How Much Is Too Much?

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, airport security has become increasingly strict and personal. Further threats, such as the "shoe bomber" and the use of non-metallic explosives, led to shoe screenings, body scanners, and enhanced pat-downs that involve more direct and firm touch, including sensitive areas. These procedures have sparked public anxiety and protests, highlighting the power of touch as a form of nonverbal communication. While TSA agents can conduct these pat-downs without probable cause, unlike police officers, experts disagree on their effectiveness. Critics argue they violate civil rights, while supporters believe more targeted screenings would improve efficiency. Public backlash has included protests, arrests, and viral videos that continue to fuel debate over airport security practices.

1. What limits, if any, do you think there should be on the use of touch in airport screening procedures?
2. In June of 2012, a passenger was charged with battery after "groping" a TSA supervisor, to, as she claims, demonstrate the treatment that she had received while being screened. Do you think that her actions were justified? Why or why not?
3. Do you think that more targeted screening, as opposed to random screenings in which each person has an equal chance of being selected for enhanced pat-downs, is a good idea? Why? Do you think such targeted screening could be seen as a case of unethical racial profiling? Why or why not?

Vocalics

We learned earlier that paralanguage refers to the vocalized but nonverbal parts of a message. **Vocalics** is the study of paralanguage, which includes the vocal qualities that go along with verbal messages, such as pitch, volume, rate, vocal quality, and verbal fillers (Andersen, 1999).

Pitch**,** the perceived variation of one's voice, also helps convey meaning, regulate conversational flow, and communicate the intensity of a message. In English, German, Hindi, Japanese, Swedish, and many other languages, ending a sentence with a higher pitch often indicates a question. Even babies in these cultures respond with recognition of being asked a question when a sentence directed to them ends in a higher pitch. We also learn that greetings have a rising emphasis and farewells have a falling emphasis. Of course, no one ever tells us these things explicitly; we learn them through observation and practice. We do not pick up on some more subtle and/or complex patterns of paralanguage involving pitch until we are older. Children, for example, have a difficult time perceiving sarcasm, which is usually conveyed through paralinguistic characteristics like pitch and tone rather than the actual words being spoken. Adults with lower than average intelligence and children have difficulty reading sarcasm in another person's voice and instead may interpret literally what they say (Andersen, 1999).

Paralanguage provides important context for the verbal content of speech. For example, volume helps communicate intensity. A louder voice is usually thought of as more intense, although a soft voice combined with a certain tone and facial expression can be just as intense. We typically adjust our volume based on our setting, the distance between people, and the relationship. In our age of computer-mediated communication, TYPING IN ALL CAPS is usually seen as offensive, as it is equated with yelling. A voice at a low volume or a whisper can be very appropriate when sending a covert message or flirting with a romantic partner, but it wouldn't enhance a person's credibility if used during a professional presentation.

Speaking rate refers to how fast or slow a person speaks and can lead others to form impressions about their emotional state, credibility, and intelligence. As with volume, variations in speaking rate can interfere with the ability of others to receive and understand verbal messages. A slow speaker could bore others and lead their attention to wander. A fast speaker may be difficult to follow, and the fast delivery can actually distract from the message. Speaking a little faster than the normal 120–150 words a minute, however, can be beneficial, as people tend to find speakers whose rate is above average more credible and intelligent (Buller & Burgoon, 1986). When speaking at a faster-than-normal rate, it is important that a speaker also clearly articulate and pronounce their words. A higher rate of speech combined with a pleasant tone of voice can also be beneficial for compliance-gaining and can aid in persuasion.

Our tone of voice can be controlled somewhat with pitch, volume, and emphasis, but each voice has a distinct quality known as a vocal signature. Voices vary in terms of resonance, pitch, and tone, and some voices are more pleasing than others. People typically find pleasing voices that employ vocal variety and are not monotone, are lower-pitched (particularly for males), and do not exhibit particular regional accents. Many people perceive nasal voices negatively and assign negative personality characteristics to them (Andersen, 1999). Think about people who have very distinct voices. Whether they are a public figure like President Barack Obama or a fictional character like SpongeBob SquarePants, some people's voices stick with us and make a favorable or unfavorable impression.

Verbal fillers are sounds that fill gaps in our speech as we think about what to say next. They are considered a part of nonverbal communication because they are not like typical words that stand in for a specific meaning or meanings. Verbal fillers such as "um," "uh," "like," and "ah" are common in regular conversation and are not typically disruptive. As we learned earlier, the use of verbal fillers can help a person "keep the floor" during a conversation if they need to pause for a moment to think before continuing with verbal communication. Verbal fillers in more formal settings, like a public speech, can, however, hurt a speaker's credibility.

Functions of Vocalics

The following is a review of the various communicative functions of vocalics:

- **Repetition.** Vocalic cues reinforce other verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., saying "I'm not sure" with an uncertain tone).
- **Complementing.** Vocalic cues elaborate on or modify verbal and nonverbal meaning (e.g., the pitch and volume used to say "I love sweet potatoes" would add context to the meaning of the sentence, such as the degree to which the person loves sweet potatoes or the use of sarcasm).
- **Accenting.** Vocalic cues allow us to emphasize particular parts of a message, which helps determine meaning (e.g., "*She* is my friend," or "She is *my* friend," or "She is my *friend*").
- **Substituting.** Vocalic cues can take the place of other verbal or nonverbal cues (e.g., saying "uh-huh" instead of "I am listening and understand what you're saying").
- **Regulating.** Vocalic cues help regulate the flow of conversation (e.g., falling pitch and a slower speaking rate usually indicate the end of a speaking turn).
- **Contradicting.** Vocalic cues may contradict other verbal or nonverbal signals (e.g., a person could say "I'm fine" in a quick, short tone that indicates otherwise).

Proxemics

Proxemics refers to the study of how space and distance influence communication. We only need to look at how space shows up in common metaphors to see that space, communication, and relationships are closely related. For example, when we are content with and attracted to someone, we say we are "close" to him or her. When we lose connection with someone, we may say he or she is "distant." In general, space influences how people communicate and behave. Smaller spaces with a higher density of people often lead to breaches of our personal space bubbles. If this is a setting where such density is expected in advance, such as at a crowded concert or on a train during rush hour, we make various communicative adjustments to manage the space issue.

Unexpected breaches of personal space can lead to negative reactions, especially if we feel someone has voluntarily violated our space, meaning that a crowding situation didn't force them into our space. Additionally, research has shown that crowding can lead to criminal or delinquent behavior, known as a "mob mentality" (Andersen, 1999). To better understand how proxemics functions in nonverbal communication, we will more closely examine the proxemic distances associated with personal space and the concept of territoriality.

Proxemic Distances

We all have varying definitions of what our "personal space" is, and these definitions are contextual and depend on the situation and the relationship. Although our bubbles are invisible, people are socialized into the norms of personal space within their cultural group. Scholars have identified four zones for US Americans, which are public, social, personal, and intimate distance (Hall, 1968). The zones are more elliptical than circular, taking up more space in our front, where our line of sight is, than at our side or back, where we can't monitor what people are doing. You can see how these zones relate to each other and to the individual in Figure 4.2.4. Even within a particular zone, interactions may differ depending on whether someone is in the outer or inner part of the zone.

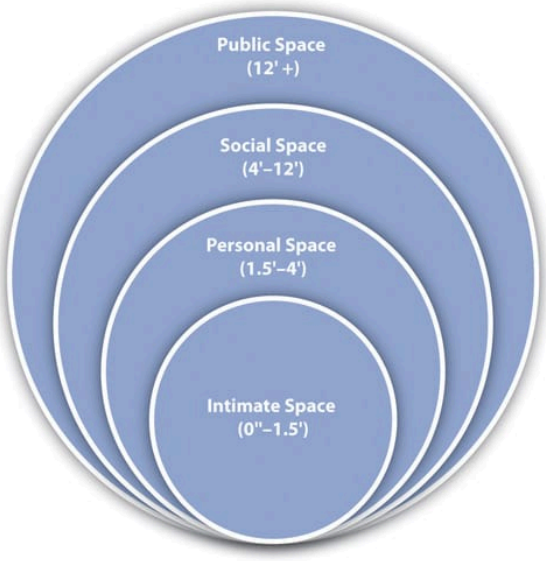


Figure 4.2.7: Proxemic Zones of Personal Space. A graphic showing four concentric circles, depicting proxemic space ranges in relationships. Alternative description of the image.

Public Space (12 Feet or More)

Public and social zones refer to the space four or more feet away from our body, and the communication that typically occurs in these zones is formal and not intimate. **Public space** starts about twelve feet from a person and extends out from there. This is the least personal of the four zones and would typically be used when a person is engaging in a formal speech and is removed from the audience to allow the audience to see, or when a high-profile or powerful person, like a celebrity or executive, maintains such a distance as a sign of power or for safety and security reasons. In terms of regular interaction, we are often not obligated or expected to acknowledge or interact with people who enter our public zone. It would be difficult to have a deep conversation with someone at this level because you have to speak louder and don't have the physical closeness that is often needed to promote emotional closeness and/or establish rapport.

Social Space (4–12 Feet)

Communication that occurs in the **social zone**, which is four to twelve feet away from our body, is typically in the context of a professional or casual interaction, but not intimate or public. This distance is preferred in many professional settings because it reduces the suspicion of any impropriety. The expression "keep someone at arm's length" means that someone is kept out of the personal space and kept in the social/professional space. If two people held up their arms and stood so just the tips of their fingers were touching, they would be around four feet away from each other, which is perceived as a safe distance because the possibility for intentional or unintentional touching doesn't exist. It is also possible to have people in the outer portion of

our social zone, but not feel obligated to interact with them. When people come much closer than six feet to us, we often feel obligated to at least acknowledge their presence. In many typically sized classrooms, much of your audience for a speech will actually be in your social zone rather than your public zone, which is actually beneficial because it helps you establish a better connection with them. Students in large lecture classes should consider sitting within the social zone of the professor, since students who sit within this zone are more likely to be remembered by the professor, be acknowledged in class, and retain more information because they are close enough to take in important nonverbal and visual cues.

Personal Space (1.5–4 Feet)

Personal and intimate zones refer to the space that starts at our physical body and extends four feet. These zones are reserved for friends, close acquaintances, and significant others. Much of our communication occurs in the personal zone, which is what we typically think of as our "personal space bubble" and extends from 1.5 feet to 4 feet away from our body. Even though we are getting closer to the physical body of another person, we may use verbal communication at this point to signal that our presence in this zone is friendly and not intimate. Even people who know each other could be uncomfortable spending too much time in this zone unnecessarily. This zone is broken up into two subzones, which helps us negotiate close interactions with people we may not be close to interpersonally (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). The outer-personal zone extends from 2.5 feet to 4 feet and is useful for conversations that need to be private but that occur between people who are not interpersonally close. This zone allows for relatively intimate communication but doesn't convey the intimacy that a closer distance would, which can be beneficial in professional settings. The inner-personal zone extends from 1.5 feet to 2.5 feet and is a space reserved for communication with people we are interpersonally close to or trying to get to know. In this subzone, we can easily touch the other person as we talk to them, briefly placing a hand on his or her arm or engaging in other light social touching that facilitates conversation, self-disclosure, and feelings of closeness.

Intimate Space

As we breach the invisible line that is 1.5 feet from our body, we enter the **intimate space,** which is reserved for only the closest friends, family, and romantic/intimate partners. It is impossible to completely ignore people when they are in this space, even if we are trying to pretend that we're ignoring them. A breach of this space can be comforting in some contexts and annoying or frightening in others. We need regular human contact that isn't just verbal but also physical. We have already discussed the importance of touch in nonverbal communication, and for that much-needed touch to occur, people have to enter our intimate space. Being close to someone and feeling their physical presence can be very comforting when words fail. There are also social norms regarding the amount of this type of closeness that can be displayed in public, as some people get uncomfortable even seeing others interacting in the intimate zone. While some people are comfortable engaging in or watching others engage in PDAs (public displays of affection), others are not. This level of comfort can vary based on cultural norms for different societies as well.

So what happens when our space is violated? Although these zones are well established in research for personal space preferences of US Americans, individuals vary in terms of their reactions to people entering certain zones, and determining what constitutes a "violation" of space is subjective and contextual. For example, another person's presence in our social or public zones doesn't typically arouse suspicion or negative physical or communicative reactions, but it could in some situations or with certain people. However, many situations lead to our personal and intimate space being breached by others against our will, and these breaches are more likely to be upsetting, even when they are expected. We've all had to get into a crowded elevator or wait in a long line. In such situations, we may rely on some verbal communication to reduce immediacy and indicate that we are not interested in closeness and are aware that a breach has occurred. People make comments about the crowd, saying, "We're really packed in here like sardines," or use humor to indicate that they are pleasant and well adjusted and uncomfortable with the breach, like any "normal" person would be. Interestingly, as we will learn in our discussion of territoriality, we do not often use verbal communication to defend our personal space during regular interactions. Instead, we rely on more nonverbal communication, like moving, crossing our arms, or avoiding eye contact, to deal with breaches of space.

Territoriality

Territoriality is an innate drive to take up and defend spaces. This drive is shared by many creatures and entities, ranging from packs of animals to individual humans to nations. Whether it's a gang territory, a neighborhood claimed by a particular salesperson, a diner's preferred place to sit in a restaurant, a student's usual desk in the classroom, or the seat a sports fan has saved for themselves while getting snacks at a sporting event, people claim certain spaces as their own. There are three main divisions for territory: primary, secondary, and public (Hargie, 2011). Sometimes our claim to a space is official. These spaces are

known as our primary territories because they are marked or understood to be exclusively ours and under our control. A person's house, yard, room, desk, side of the bed, or shelf in the medicine cabinet could be considered primary territories.

Secondary territories don't belong to us and aren't exclusively under our control, but they are associated with us, which may lead us to assume that the space will be open and available to us when we need it without us taking any further steps to reserve it. This happens in classrooms regularly. Students often sit at the same desk or at least in the same general area as they did on the first day of class. There may be some small adjustments during the first couple of weeks, but by a month into the semester, I don't notice students moving much voluntarily. When someone else takes a student's regular desk, she or he is typically annoyed. I do classroom observations for the graduate teaching assistants I supervise, which means I come into the classroom toward the middle of the semester and take a seat in the back to evaluate the class session. Although I don't intend to take someone's seat, on more than one occasion, I've been met by the confused or even glaring eyes of a student whose routine is suddenly interrupted when they see me sitting in "their seat."

Public territories are open to all people. People are allowed to mark public territory and use it for a limited period of time, but space is often up for grabs, which makes public space difficult to manage for some people and can lead to conflict. To avoid this type of situation, people use a variety of objects that are typically recognized by others as nonverbal cues that mark a place as temporarily reserved—for example, jackets, bags, papers, or a drink. There is some ambiguity in the use of markers, though. A half-empty cup of coffee may be seen as trash and thrown away, which would be an annoying surprise to a person who left it to mark his or her table while visiting the restroom. One scholar's informal observations revealed that a full drink sitting on a table could reserve a space in a university cafeteria for more than an hour, but a cup only half full usually only worked as a marker of territory for less than ten minutes. People have to decide how much value they want their marker to have. Obviously, leaving a laptop on a table indicates that the table is occupied, but it could also lead to the laptop getting stolen. A pencil, on the other hand, could just be moved out of the way, and the space usurped.

Chronemics

Chronemics refers to the study of how time affects communication. Time can be classified into several different categories, including biological, personal, physical, and cultural time (Andersen, 1999). Biological time refers to the rhythms of living things. Humans follow a circadian rhythm, meaning that we are on a daily cycle that influences when we eat, sleep, and wake. When our natural rhythms are disturbed by all-nighters, jet lag, or other scheduling abnormalities, our physical and mental health, our communication competence, and our personal relationships can suffer. Keep biological time in mind as you communicate with others. Remember that early morning conversations and speeches may require more preparation to get yourself awake enough to communicate well and a more patient or energetic delivery to accommodate others who may still be getting warmed up for their day.

Personal time refers to how individuals experience time. The way we experience time varies based on our mood, our interest level, and other factors. Think about how quickly time passes when you are interested in and therefore engaged in something. A fifty-minute class may drag on forever, whereas a three-hour class can zip by. Individuals also vary based on whether or not they are future or past-oriented. People with past-time orientations may want to reminisce, reunite with old friends, and put considerable time into preserving memories and keepsakes in scrapbooks and photo albums. People with future-time orientations may spend the same amount of time making career and personal plans, writing out to-do lists, or researching future vacations, potential retirement spots, or what book they're going to read next.

Physical time refers to the fixed cycles of days, years, and seasons. Physical time, especially seasons, can affect our mood and psychological states. Some people experience seasonal affective disorder that leads them to experience emotional distress and anxiety during the changes of seasons, primarily from warm and bright to dark and cold (summer to fall and winter).

Cultural time refers to how a large group of people views time. **Polychronic** people do not view time as a linear progression that needs to be divided into small units and scheduled in advance. Polychronic people keep more flexible schedules and may engage in several activities at once. **Monochronic** people tend to schedule their time more rigidly and do one thing at a time. A polychronic or monochronic orientation to time influences our social realities and how we interact with others.

Additionally, the way we use time depends in some ways on our status. For example, doctors can make their patients wait for extended periods of time, and executives and celebrities may run consistently behind schedule, making others wait for them. Promptness and the amount of time that is socially acceptable for lateness and waiting vary among individuals and contexts. Chronemics also covers the amount of time we spend talking. We've already learned that conversational turns and turn-taking patterns are influenced by social norms and help our conversations progress. We all know how annoying it can be when a person dominates a conversation or when we can't get a person to contribute anything.

Personal Presentation and Environment

Personal presentation involves two components: our physical characteristics and the artifacts with which we adorn and surround ourselves. **Physical characteristics** include body shape, height, weight, attractiveness, and other physical features of our bodies. We do not have as much control over how these nonverbal cues are encoded as we do with many other aspects of nonverbal communication. These characteristics play a large role in initial impression formation, even though we know we "shouldn't judge a book by its cover." Although ideals of attractiveness vary among cultures and individuals, research consistently indicates that people who are deemed attractive based on physical characteristics have distinct advantages in many aspects of life. This fact, along with media images that project often unrealistic ideals of beauty, has contributed to booming health and beauty, dieting, gym, and plastic surgery industries. While there have been some controversial reality shows that seek to transform people's physical characteristics, the relative ease with which we can change the artifacts that send nonverbal cues about us has led to many more style and space makeover shows.

Artifacts include clothes, jewelry, visible body art, hairstyles, and other political, social, and cultural symbols that send messages to others about who we are. In the United States, body piercings and tattoos have been shifting from subcultural to mainstream over the past few decades. The physical location, size, and number of tattoos and piercings play a large role in whether or not they are deemed appropriate for professional contexts, and many people with tattoos and/or piercings make conscious choices about when and where they display their body art. Hair also sends messages, whether it is on our heads or our bodies. As styles change, so too do the perceptions others have toward them. In previous years, men with short hair were generally viewed as being more conservative than men with long hair; men with shaved heads might have been seen as aggressive. and someone with a mohawk, or neon-colored hair, might have been seen as rebellious. But nowadays, as styles continue to evolve and integrate more into mainstream society, perceptions toward these artifacts are also broadening and evolving.

Jewelry can also send messages with varying degrees of direct meaning. A ring on the "ring finger" of a person's left hand typically indicates that they are married or in an otherwise committed relationship. A thumb ring or a right-hand ring on the "ring finger" doesn't send such a direct message. People also adorn their clothes, body, or belongings with religious or cultural symbols, like a cross to indicate a person's Christian faith or a rainbow flag to indicate that a person is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or an ally to one or more of those groups. People now wear various types of rubber bracelets, which have become a popular form of social cause marketing, to indicate that they identify with a particular social or political movement.

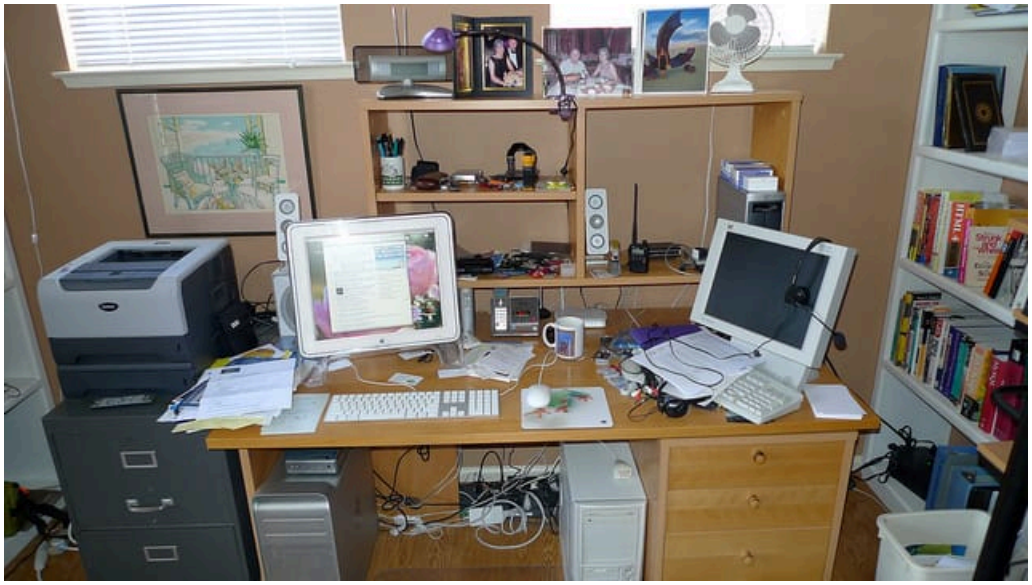


Figure 4.2.8: The objects that surround us send nonverbal cues that may influence how people perceive us. What impression does a messy, crowded office make? (CC BY-NC 2.0; Phil Stripling via Flickr)

Finally, the third environment in which we interact also affects our verbal and nonverbal communication. This is included because we can often manipulate the nonverbal environment, similar to how we would manipulate our gestures or tone of voice to suit our communicative needs. The books that we display on our coffee table, the magazines a doctor keeps in his or her waiting room, the placement of fresh flowers in a foyer, or a piece of mint chocolate on a hotel bed pillow all send particular messages and can easily be changed. The placement of objects and furniture in a physical space can help create a formal, distant, friendly, or intimate climate. In terms of formality, we can use nonverbal communication to convey dominance and status, which helps define

and negotiate power and roles within relationships. Fancy cars and expensive watches can serve as symbols that distinguish a CEO from an entry-level employee. A room with soft lighting, a small fountain that creates ambient sounds of water flowing, and a comfy chair can help facilitate interactions between a therapist and a patient. In summary, whether we know it or not, our physical characteristics and the artifacts that surround us communicate a lot.

Think About This 4.2.3 Are We Becoming Our Own Avatars?

Avatars are digital characters that represent users or interact with them in online and real-world settings. Avatars can be created in the likeness of humans, animals, aliens, or other nonhuman creatures (Allmendinger, 2010). They range from simple profile images to realistic animations and even holograms used in places like airports. Research shows that avatars can influence people even when they are not highly advanced, especially when they resemble the user but reflect an ideal version of the self. Features such as attractiveness, age, and style strongly affect how motivating an avatar can be.

Many people create avatars for games, virtual worlds, and educational platforms, often spending hours interacting as their digital character. As a result, users may begin to identify closely with their avatars, blurring the line between virtual and real life.

Avatars have been shown to change real-world behavior. For example, one study found that people who watched an avatar that looked like them exercising and losing weight in an online environment exercised more and ate healthier in the real world (Fox & Bailenson, 2009). Because avatars are customizable in ways real bodies are not, they often become extensions of identity and influence both online and offline communication.

The growing use of avatars in work and social contexts brings up some valid ethical questions. For example:

In 2009, a man in Japan became the first human to marry an avatar. Although he claims that his avatar is better than any human girlfriend, he has been criticized as being out of touch with reality. This begs the following questions:

1. Do you think the boundaries between human reality and avatar fantasy will continue to fade as we become a more technologically fused world?
2. How do you feel about interacting more with avatars in customer service situations like the airport avatar mentioned above?

Key Takeaways

- Kinesics refers to body movements and posture and includes gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions.
- Haptics refers to touch behaviors that convey meaning during interactions.
- Vocalics refers to the vocalized but not verbal aspects of nonverbal communication, including our speaking rate, pitch, volume, tone of voice, and vocal quality. T
- Proxemics refers to the use of space and distance within communication. Americans, in general, have four zones that constitute our personal space: the public zone, the social zone, the personal zone, and the intimate zone. Proxemics also studies territoriality, or how people take up and defend personal space.
- Chronemics refers to the study of how time affects communication and includes how different time cycles affect our communication.

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4.3: Nonverbal Communication Competence

Understanding Nonverbal Communication Competence

As we age, we internalize social and cultural norms related to sending (encoding) and interpreting (decoding) nonverbal communication. In terms of sending, the tendency to send unmonitored nonverbal signals reduces as we get older and begin to monitor and perhaps censor or mask them (Andersen, 1999). Similarly, as we become more experienced communicators, we tend to think that we become better at interpreting nonverbal messages. In this section, we will discuss strategies for effectively encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. As we've already learned, we receive little, if any, official instruction in nonverbal communication, but you can think of this section as a training manual to help improve your own nonverbal communication competence.

As with all aspects of communication, improving your nonverbal communication takes commitment and continued effort. However, research shows that education and training in nonverbal communication can lead to quick gains in knowledge and skill (Riggio, 1992). Additionally, once the initial effort is put into improving your nonverbal encoding and decoding skills and those new skills are put into practice, people are encouraged by the positive reactions from others. People enjoy interacting with others who are skilled at nonverbal encoding and decoding, which will be evident in their reactions, providing further motivation and encouragement to hone your skills.

Guidelines for Sending Nonverbal Messages

First impressions matter; nonverbal cues account for much of the content from which we form initial impressions, so it's important to know that people make judgments about our identities and skills after only brief exposure. Our competence regarding awareness of nonverbal communication can help determine how an interaction will proceed and, in fact, whether it will take place at all. People who are skilled at encoding nonverbal messages are more favorably evaluated after initial encounters. This is likely because people who are more nonverbally expressive are also more attention-grabbing and engaging, and make people feel more welcome due to increased immediacy behaviors, all of which enhance perceptions of charisma.

Nonverbal Communication has a Multichannel Nature

We rarely send a nonverbal message in isolation. For example, a posture may be combined with a touch or eye behavior to create what is called a **nonverbal cluster** (Pease & Pease, 2004). **Nonverbal congruence** refers to consistency among different nonverbal expressions within a cluster. Congruent nonverbal communication is more credible and effective than ambiguous or conflicting nonverbal cues. Even though you may intend for your nonverbal messages to be congruent, they could still be decoded in a way that doesn't match up with your intent, especially since nonverbal expressions vary in terms of their degree of conscious encoding. In this sense, the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication creates the potential of both increased credibility and increased ambiguity.



Figure 4.3.1: Several people conversing in a group setting using a variety of nonverbal communication forms, namely hand gestures and eye contact—illustrating the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication and how gestures can combine with posture, eye contact, and other cues to form a nonverbal cluster. (CC BY 2.0; Beatrice Murch via Wikimedia Commons)

When we become more aware of the messages we are sending, we can monitor for nonverbal signals that are incongruent with other messages or may be perceived as such. If a student is talking to their professor about their performance in the class and concerns about their grade, the professor may lean forward and nod, encoding a combination of body orientation and head movement that conveys attention. If the professor, however, regularly breaks eye contact and looks anxiously at their office door, then they are sending a message that could be perceived as disinterest, which is incongruent with the overall message of care and concern they probably want to encode. Increasing our awareness of the multiple channels through which we send nonverbal cues can help us make our signals more congruent in the moment.

Nonverbal Communication Affects Our Interactions

Changing our nonverbal signals can affect our thoughts and emotions; knowing this allows us to have more control over the trajectory of our communication, possibly allowing us to intervene in a negative cycle. For example, if you are waiting in line to get your driver's license renewed and the agents in front of you are moving more slowly than you'd like, and the person in front of you doesn't have their materials organized and is asking unnecessary questions, you might start to exhibit nonverbal clusters that signal frustration. You might cross your arms, a closing-off gesture, and combine that with wrapping your fingers tightly around one bicep and occasionally squeezing, which is a self-touch adaptor that results from anxiety and stress. The longer you stand like that, the more frustrated and defensive you will become, because that nonverbal cluster reinforces and heightens your feelings. Increased awareness about these cycles can help you make conscious moves to change your nonverbal communication and, subsequently, your cognitive and emotional states (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

As your nonverbal encoding competence increases, you can strategically manipulate your behaviors. Restaurant servers, bartenders, car salespeople, realtors, and many others who work in a service or sales capacity know that part of "sealing the deal" is making people feel liked, valued, and important. The strategic use of nonverbal communication to convey these messages is largely accepted and expected in our society. As customers or patrons, we often play along because it feels good in the moment to think that the other person actually cares about us. Using nonverbals that are intentionally deceptive and misleading can have negative consequences and cross the line into unethical communication.

As you get better at monitoring and controlling your nonverbal behaviors and understanding how nonverbal cues affect your interaction, you may show more competence in multiple types of communication. For example, people who are more skilled at monitoring and controlling nonverbal displays of emotion report that they are more comfortable public speakers (Riggio, 1992). Since speakers become more nervous when they think that audience members are able to detect their nervousness based on outwardly visible, mostly nonverbal cues, it is logical that confidence in one's ability to control those outwardly visible cues would result in a lessening of that common fear.

Nonverbal Communication Creates Rapport

Humans have evolved an innate urge to mirror each other's nonverbal behavior, and although we aren't often aware of it, this urge influences our behavior daily (Pease & Pease, 2004). For example, think about how people "fall into formation" when waiting in a line. Our nonverbal communication works to create an unspoken and subconscious cooperation, as people move and behave in similar ways. When one person leans to the left, the next person in line may also lean to the left, and this shift in posture may continue all the way down the line to the end, until someone else makes another movement and the whole line shifts again. This phenomenon is known as **mirroring**, which refers to the often subconscious practice of using nonverbal cues in a way that matches those of others around us. Mirroring sends implicit messages to others that say, "Look! I'm just like you." Mirroring evolved as an important social function in that it allowed early humans to more easily fit in with larger groups. Logically, early humans who were more successful at mirroring were more likely to secure food, shelter, and security, and therefore passed that genetic disposition down the line to us.



Figure 4.3.2: Conversational partners displaying similar posture and identical gestures, demonstrating mirroring: the subconscious matching of others' nonverbal behavior that helps build connection, coordination, and social rapport. (CC BY-SA 3.0 DE; S. Krupp via Wikimedia Commons)

Mirroring is largely innate and subconscious, but we can more consciously use it and a variety of other nonverbal signals, like the immediacy behaviors we discussed earlier, to help create social bonds and mutual liking.

Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversations

The ability to encode appropriate turn-taking signals can help ensure that we can hold the floor when needed in a conversation or work our way into a conversation smoothly, without inappropriately interrupting someone or otherwise being seen as rude. People with nonverbal encoding competence are typically more "in control" of conversations. This regulating function can be useful in initial encounters when we are trying to learn more about another person and in situations where status differentials are present or compliance-gaining or dominance are goals. Although close friends, family, and relational partners can sometimes be an exception, interrupting is generally considered rude and should be avoided. Even though verbal communication is most often used to interrupt another person, interruptions are still studied as a part of chronemics because it interferes with another person's talk time. Instead of interrupting, you can use nonverbal signals like leaning in, increasing your eye contact, or using a brief gesture like subtly raising one hand or the index finger to signal to another person that you'd like to soon take the floor.

Nonverbal Communication Impacts Listening

Part of being a good listener involves nonverbal-encoding competence, as nonverbal feedback in the form of head nods, eye contact, and posture can signal that a listener is paying attention and the speaker's message is received and understood. For example, active listening combines good cognitive listening practices with outwardly visible cues that signal to others that we are listening. Listeners are expected to make more eye contact with the speaker than the speaker makes with them, so it's important to "listen with your eyes" by maintaining eye contact, which signals attentiveness. Listeners should also avoid

distracting movements in the form of self, other, and object adaptors. Being a higher self-monitor can help you catch nonverbal signals that might signal that you aren't listening, at which point you could consciously switch to more active listening signals.

Nonverbal Communication Impacts Impression Management

The nonverbal messages we encode also help us express our identities and play into impression management. Being able to control nonverbal expressions and competently encode them allows us to better manage our persona and project a desired self to others. Being nonverbally expressive during initial interactions usually leads to more favorable impressions; smiling, keeping an attentive posture, and offering a solid handshake help communicate confidence and enthusiasm that can be useful on a first date, during a job interview, when visiting family for the holidays, or when running into an acquaintance at the grocery store. Nonverbal communication can also impact the impressions you make as a student. Research has also found that students who are more nonverbally expressive are liked more by their teachers and are more likely to have their requests met by their teachers (Mottet et al., 2004).

Try This 4.3.1 Specific Channels of Nonverbal Communication

While it is important to recognize that we send nonverbal signals through multiple channels simultaneously, we can also increase our nonverbal communication competence by becoming more aware of how it operates within specific channels.

Kinesics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal messages sent using your hands, arms, body, and face.

Gestures

- Illustrators, i.e., physical gestures, make our verbal communication more engaging.
- Remember that adaptors can hurt your credibility in more formal or serious interactions. Figure out what your common adaptors are and monitor them so you can avoid creating unfavorable impressions.
- Gestures send messages about your emotional state. Since many gestures are spontaneous or subconscious, it is important to raise your awareness of them and monitor them. Be aware that clenched hands may signal aggression or anger, nail biting or fidgeting may signal nervousness, and finger tapping may signal boredom.

Eye Contact

- Eye contact is useful for initiating and regulating conversations. To make sure someone is available for interaction and to avoid being perceived as rude, it is usually a good idea to "catch their eye" before you start talking to them.
- Avoiding eye contact or shifting your eye contact from place to place can lead others to think you are being deceptive or inattentive. Minimize distractions by moving a clock, closing a door, or closing window blinds to help minimize distractions that may lure your eye contact away.
- Although avoiding eye contact can be perceived as a sign of disinterest, low confidence, or negative emotionality, eye contact avoidance can be used positively as a face-saving strategy. The notion of **civil inattention** refers to a social norm that leads us to avoid making eye contact with people in situations that deviate from expected social norms, such as witnessing someone fall or being in close proximity to a stranger expressing negative emotions (like crying). We also use civil inattention when we avoid making eye contact with others in crowded spaces (Goffman, 2010).

Facial Expressions

- You can use facial expressions to manage your expressions of emotions to intensify what you're feeling, to diminish what you're feeling, to cover up what you're feeling, to express a different emotion than you're feeling, or to simulate an emotion that you're not feeling (Metts & Planlap, 2002).
- Be aware of the power of emotional contagion, or the spread of emotion from one person to another. Since facial expressions are key for emotional communication, you may be able to strategically use your facial expressions to cheer someone up, lighten a mood, or create a more serious and/or somber tone.
- Smiles are especially powerful as an immediacy behavior and a rapport-building tool. Smiles can also help to disarm a potentially hostile person or de-escalate conflict.

Haptics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals using touch.

- Remember that culture, status, gender, age, and setting influence how we send and interpret touch messages.
- In professional and social settings, it is generally okay to touch others on the arm or shoulder.

These are types of touch to avoid (Andersen, 1999):

- Avoid touching strangers unless being introduced or offering assistance.
- Avoid hurtful touches and apologize if they occur, even if accidentally.
- Avoid startling and/or surprising another person with your touch.
- Avoid interrupting touches, such as hugging someone while they are talking to someone else.
- Avoid moving people out of the way with only touch; pair your touch with a verbal message like "excuse me."
- Avoid overly aggressive touch, especially when disguised as playful touch (e.g., horseplay taken too far).
- Avoid combining touch with negative criticism; a hand on the shoulder during a critical statement can increase a person's defensiveness and seem condescending or aggressive.

Vocalics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals using paralanguage.

- Verbal fillers are often used subconsciously and can negatively affect your credibility and reduce the clarity of your message when speaking in more formal situations. In fact, verbal fluency is one of the strongest predictors of persuasiveness (Hargie, 2011). Becoming a higher self-monitor can help you notice your use of verbal fillers and begin to eliminate them. Beginner speakers can often reduce their use of verbal fillers noticeably over just a short period of time.
- Vocal variety increases listener and speaker engagement, understanding, information recall, and motivation. So, having a more expressive voice that varies appropriately in terms of rate, pitch, and volume can help you achieve communication goals related to maintaining attention, effectively conveying information, and getting others to act in a particular way.

Proxemics

The following may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to interpersonal distances.

- When breaches of personal space occur, it is a social norm to make nonverbal adjustments such as lowering our level of immediacy, changing our body orientations, and using objects to separate ourselves from others. To reduce immediacy, we engage in civil inattention and reduce the amount of eye contact we make with others. We also shift the front of our body away from others since it has most of our sensory inputs and also allows access to body parts that are considered vulnerable, such as the stomach, face, and genitals (Andersen, 1999). When we can't shift our bodies, we often use coats, bags, books, or our hands to physically separate or block off the front of our bodies from others.
- Although pets and children are often granted more leeway to breach other people's space, since they are still learning social norms and rules, as a pet owner, parent, or temporary caretaker, be aware of this possibility and try to prevent such breaches or correct them when they occur.

Chronemics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to time.

- In terms of talk time and turn-taking, research shows that people who take a little longer with their turn, holding the floor slightly longer than normal, are actually seen as more credible than people who talk too much or too little (Andersen, 1999).
- Our lateness or promptness can send messages about our professionalism, dependability, or other personality traits. **Formal time** usually applies to professional situations in which we are expected to be on time or even a few minutes early. You generally wouldn't want to be late for work, a job interview, a medical appointment, and so on. **Informal time** applies to casual and interpersonal situations in which there is much more variation in terms of expectations for promptness. For most social meetings with one other person or a small group, you can be five minutes late without having to offer much of an apology or explanation. For larger social gatherings, you can usually be fifteen minutes late as long as your late arrival doesn't interfere with the host's plans or preparations.

- Quality time is an important part of interpersonal relationships, and sometimes time has to be budgeted so that it can be saved and spent with certain people or on certain occasions, like date nights for couples or family time for parents and children or other relatives.

Personal Presentation and Environment

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to personal presentation and environment.

- Recognize that personal presentation carries much weight in terms of initial impressions, so meeting the expectations and social norms for dress, grooming, and other nonverbal communication is especially important for impression management.
- Recognize that some environments facilitate communication and some do not. A traditional front-facing business or educational setup is designed for one person to communicate with a larger audience. People in the audience cannot as easily interact with each other because they can't see each other face-to-face without turning. A horseshoe or circular arrangement allows everyone to make eye contact and facilitates interaction. Even close proximity doesn't necessarily facilitate interaction. For example, a comfortable sofa may bring four people together, but eye contact among all four is nearly impossible if they're all facing the same direction.
- Where you choose to sit can also impact perceived characteristics and leadership decisions. People who sit at the head or center of a table are often chosen to be leaders by others because of their nonverbal accessibility; a decision which may have more to do with where the person chose to sit than the person's perceived or actual leadership abilities. Research has found that juries often select their foreperson based on where they happen to sit (Andersen, 1999). Keep this in mind the next time you take your seat at a meeting.

Guidelines for Interpreting Nonverbal Messages

We learn to decode or interpret nonverbal messages through practice and by internalizing social norms. Following the suggestions to become a better encoder of nonverbal communication will lead to better decoding competence through increased awareness. Since nonverbal communication is more ambiguous than verbal communication, we have to learn to interpret these cues as clusters within contexts. A good way to increase knowledge about nonverbal communication is to engage in people watching. Just by consciously taking in the variety of nonverbal signals around us, we can build our awareness and occasionally be entertained. Skilled decoders of nonverbal messages are said to have nonverbal sensitivity, which, very similarly to skilled encoders, leads them to have larger social networks, be more popular, and exhibit less social anxiety (Riggio, 1992).

There Is No Nonverbal Dictionary

The first guideline for decoding nonverbal communication is to realize that there is no nonverbal dictionary. Some nonverbal scholars and many nonverbal skill trainers have tried to catalog nonverbal communication like we do verbal communication to create dictionary-like guides that people can use to interpret nonverbal signals. Although those guides may contain many valid "rules" of nonverbal communication, those rules are always relative to the individual, social, and cultural contexts in which an interaction takes place. In short, you can't read people's nonverbal communication like a book, and there are no A-to-Z guides that capture the complexity of nonverbal communication (DePaulo, 1992).

Nonverbal Signals are Related

The second guideline for decoding nonverbal signals is to recognize that certain nonverbal signals are related. Nonverbal rule books aren't effective because they typically view a nonverbal signal in isolation, similar to how dictionaries separately list denotative definitions of words. To get a more nuanced understanding of the meaning behind nonverbal cues, we can look at them as progressive or layered. For example, people engaging in negative critical evaluation of a speaker may cross their legs, cross one arm over their stomach, and put the other arm up so the index finger is resting close to the eye while the chin rests on the thumb (Pease & Pease, 2004). A person wouldn't likely perform all those signals simultaneously. Instead, they would likely start with one and then layer more cues on as the feelings intensified. If we notice that a person is starting to build related signals like the ones above onto one another, we might be able to intervene in the negative reaction that is building. Of course, as nonverbal cues are layered on, they may contradict other signals, in which case we can turn to context clues to aid our interpretation.

Nonverbal Cues in Context

We will learn more specifics about nonverbal communication in relational, professional, and cultural contexts in Section 4.4: Nonverbal Communication in Context, but we can also gain insight into how to interpret nonverbal cues through personal contexts. People have idiosyncratic nonverbal behaviors, which create an individual context that varies with each person. Even though we generally fit into certain social and cultural patterns, some people deviate from those norms. For example, some cultures tend toward less touching and greater interpersonal distances during interactions. The United States falls into this general category, but there are people who were socialized into these norms who as individuals deviate from them and touch more and stand closer to others while conversing. As the idiosyncratic communicator inches toward their conversational partner, the partner may inch back to reestablish the interpersonal distance norm. Such deviations may lead people to misinterpret sexual or romantic interest or feel uncomfortable. While these actions could indicate such interest, they could also be idiosyncratic. As this example shows, these individual differences can increase the ambiguity of nonverbal communication, but when observed over a period of time, they can actually help us generate meaning. Try to compare observed nonverbal cues to a person's typical or baseline nonverbal behavior to help avoid misinterpretation. In some instances it is impossible to know what sorts of individual nonverbal behaviors or idiosyncrasies people have because there isn't a relational history. In such cases, we have to turn to our knowledge about specific types of nonverbal communication or draw from more general contextual knowledge.

Try This 4.3.2 Interpreting Cues within Specific Channels

When nonverbal cues are ambiguous or contextual clues aren't useful in interpreting nonverbal clusters, we may have to look at nonverbal behaviors within specific channels. Keep in mind that the following tips aren't hard and fast rules and are usually more meaningful when adapted according to a specific person or context. In addition, many of the suggestions in the section on encoding competence can be adapted usefully to decoding.

Gestures (Kinesics)

- While it doesn't always mean a person is being honest, displaying palms is largely unconsciously encoded and decoded as a sign of openness and truthfulness. Conversely, crossing your arms in front of your chest is very frequently decoded as a negative gesture that conveys defensiveness.
- We typically decode people putting their hands in their pocket as a gesture that indicates shyness or discomfort. Men may often subconsciously put their hands in their pockets when they don't want to participate in a conversation. But displaying the thumb or thumbs while the rest of the hand is in the pocket is a signal of a dominant or authoritative attitude.
- Nervous communicators may have distracting mannerisms in the form of adaptors that you will likely need to tune out in order to focus more on other verbal and nonverbal cues.

Head Movements and Posture (Kinesics)

- The head leaning over and being supported by a hand can typically be decoded as a sign of boredom, the thumb supporting the chin and the index finger touching the head close to the temple or eye as a sign of negative evaluative thoughts, and the chin stroke as a sign that a person is going through a decision-making process (Pease & Pease, 2004).
- In terms of seated posture, leaning back is usually decoded as a sign of informality and indifference, straddling a chair as a sign of dominance (but also some insecurity because the person is protecting the vulnerable front part of their body), and leaning forward as a signal of interest and attentiveness.

Eye Contact (Kinesics)

- When someone is avoiding eye contact, don't immediately assume they are not listening or are hiding something, especially if you are conveying complex or surprising information. Since looking away also signals cognitive activity, they may be processing information, and you may need to pause and ask if they need a second to think or if they need you to repeat or explain anything more.
- A "sideways glance," which entails keeping the head and face pointed straight ahead while focusing the eyes to the left or right, has multiple contradictory meanings ranging from interest to uncertainty to hostility. When the sideways glance is paired with a slightly raised eyebrow or smile, it is a sign of interest. When combined with a furrowed brow, it generally conveys uncertainty. However, add a frown to that mix, and it can signal hostility (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Facial Expressions (Kinesics)

- Be aware of discrepancies between facial expressions and other nonverbal gestures and verbal communication. Since facial expressions are often subconscious, they may be an indicator of incongruency within a speaker's message, and you may need to follow up with questions or consider contextual clues to increase your understanding.

Haptics

- Consider the status and power dynamics involved in a touch. In general, people who have or feel they have more social power in a situation typically engage in more touching behaviors with those with less social power. So, you may decode a touch from a supervisor differently from the touch of an acquaintance.

Vocalics

- People often decode personality traits from a person's vocal quality. In general, a person's vocal signature is a result of the physiology of their neck, head, and mouth. Therefore, a nasal voice or a deep voice may not have any relevant meaning within an interaction. Try not to focus on something you find unpleasant or pleasant about someone's voice; focus on the content rather than the vocal quality.

Proxemics

- The size of a person's "territory" often speaks to that person's status. At universities, deans may have suites, department chairs may have large offices with multiple sitting areas, lower-ranked professors may have "cozier" offices stuffed with books and file cabinets, and adjunct instructors may have a shared office or desk or no office space at all.
- Since infringements on others' territory can arouse angry reactions and even lead to violence (think of the countless stories of neighbors fighting over a fence or tree), be sensitive to territorial markers. In secondary and public territories, look for informal markers such as drinks, books, or jackets, and be respectful of them when possible.

Personal Presentation and Environment

- Be aware of the **physical attractiveness bias**, which leads people to sometimes mistakenly equate attractiveness with goodness (Hargie, 2011). A person's attractive or unattractive physical presentation can lead to irrelevant decoding that is distracting from other, more meaningful nonverbal cues.

Detecting Deception

Although people rely on nonverbal communication more than verbal communication to determine whether or not a person is being deceptive, there is no set profile of deceptive behaviors that you can use to create your own nonverbally based lie detector. Research finds that people generally perceive themselves as good detectors of deception, but when tested, people only accurately detect deception at levels a little higher than what we would by random chance, people are in fact not good detectors of deception contrary to their beliefs. Given that deception is so widespread and common, it is estimated that we actually only detect about half the lies that we are told, meaning we all operate on false information without even being aware of it. Although this may be disappointing to those of you reading who like to think of yourselves as human lie detectors, there are some forces working against our deception-detecting abilities. One such force is the **truth bias**, which leads us to believe that a person is telling the truth, especially if we know and like that person. Conversely, people who have interpersonal trust issues and people in occupations like law enforcement may also have a **lie bias**, meaning they assume people are lying to them more often than not (Andersen, 1999).



Figure 4.3.3: Two women engaged in conversation, highlighting how observers often rely on facial expressions and body language to judge honesty, despite research showing that nonverbal cues alone are unreliable indicators of deception due to factors like truth bias and lie bias. Notice how one woman is squinting with her hand out and the other has a hand wrapped around her chest and side, with a hand on her chin. (CC BY 2.0; Andrew via Wikimedia Commons)

It is believed that deceptive nonverbal behaviors result from **nonverbal leakage**, which refers to nonverbal behaviors that occur as we try to control the cognitive and physical changes that happen during states of cognitive and physical arousal (Hargie, 2011). **Anxiety** is a form of arousal that leads to bodily reactions like those we experience when we perceive danger or become excited for some other reason. Some of these reactions are visible, such as increased movements, and some are audible, such as changes in voice pitch, volume, or rate. Other reactions, such as changes in the electrical conductivity of the skin, increased breathing, and increased heart rate, are not always detectable. Polygraph machines, or lie detectors, work on the principle that the presence of signs of arousal is a reliable indicator of deception in situations where other factors that would also evoke such signals are absent.

So the nonverbal behaviors that we associate with deception don't actually stem from the deception but the attempts to control the leakage that results from the cognitive and physiological changes. These signals appear and increase because we are conflicted about the act of deception, since we are conditioned to believe that being honest is better than lying, we are afraid of getting caught and punished, and we are motivated to succeed with the act of deception. Leakage also occurs because of the increased cognitive demands associated with deception. Our cognitive activity increases when we have to decide whether to engage in deception or not, which often involves some internal debate. If we decide to engage in deception, we then have to compose a fabrication or execute some other manipulation strategy that we think is believable. To make things more complicated, we usually tailor our manipulation strategy to the person to whom we are speaking. In short, lying isn't easy, as it requires us to go against social norms and deviate from the comfortable and familiar communication scripts that we rely on for so much of our interaction. Of course, skilled and experienced deceivers develop new scripts that can also become familiar and comfortable and allow them to engage in deception without arousing as much anxiety or triggering the physical reactions to it (Andersen, 1999).

Certain nonverbal cues have been associated with deception, but the problem is that these cues are also associated with other behaviors, which could lead you to assume someone is being deceptive when they are actually nervous, guilty, or excited. In general, people who are more expressive are better deceivers and people who are typically anxious are not good liars. Also, people who are better self-monitors are better deceivers, because they are aware of verbal and nonverbal signals that may "give them away" and may be better able to control or account for them. Research also shows that people get better at lying as they get older, because they learn more about the intricacies of communication signals and they also get more time to practice (Andersen, 1999). Studies have found that actors, politicians, lawyers, and salespeople are also better liars, because they are generally higher self-monitors and have learned how to suppress internal feelings and monitor their external behaviors.

Key Takeaways

- Effective nonverbal communication relies on monitoring multiple channels to ensure congruence and avoid sending conflicting signals.

- Nonverbal cues strongly influence first impressions, interpersonal rapport, and social evaluations, making awareness and intentional control crucial.
- Mirroring and immediacy behaviors help build social bonds and foster cooperation, often operating subconsciously.
- Nonverbal behaviors like adaptors, facial expressions, touch, and vocalics can reinforce or escalate emotions such as anxiety and influence our cognitive and emotional states.
- Understanding nonverbal signals associated with deception (lie bias, nonverbal leakage, and physical attractiveness bias) improves interpretation but requires contextual awareness, as cues are not always reliable indicators of intent.

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4.4: Nonverbal Communication in Context

The Importance of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication receives less attention than verbal communication in our everyday lives. Learning more about nonverbal communication and becoming more aware of our own and others' use of nonverbal cues can help us be better relational partners and better professionals. Learning about cultural differences in nonverbal communication is crucial for those traveling abroad and essential for effectively navigating diverse personal and professional environments.

Nonverbal Communication in Relational Contexts

A central, if not primary, function of nonverbal communication is the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Further, people who are skilled at encoding nonverbal messages have various interpersonal advantages, including being more popular, having larger social networks consisting of both acquaintances and close friends, and being less likely to be lonely or socially anxious (Riggio, 1992).

Nonverbal communication increases our expressiveness, and people generally find it attractive and want to pay more attention to things they find expressive. This increases our chances of initiating interpersonal relationships. Relationships then form as a result of some initial exchanges of verbal and nonverbal information through mutual self-disclosure. As the depth of self-disclosure increases, messages become more meaningful if they are accompanied by congruent nonverbal cues. Impressions formed at this stage of interaction help determine whether or not a relationship will progress. As relationships progress from basic information exchange and the establishment of early interpersonal bonds to more substantial emotional connections, nonverbal communication plays a more central role. As we've learned, nonverbal communication conveys much emotional meaning. Hence, the ability to effectively encode and decode appropriate nonverbal messages sent through facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and touch leads to high-quality interactions that are rewarding for the communicators involved.

Nonverbal communication helps maintain relationships once they have moved beyond the initial stages by helping us communicate emotions and seek and provide social and emotional support. In terms of communicating emotions, competent communicators know when it is appropriate to express emotions and when more self-regulation is needed. They also know how to adjust their emotional expressions to fit various contexts and individuals, which is useful in preventing emotional imbalances within a relationship. Emotional imbalances occur when one relational partner expresses too much emotion in a way that becomes a burden for the other person. Ideally, each person in a relationship is able to express their emotions in a way that isn't too taxing for the other person. Occasionally, one relational partner may be going through an extended period of emotional distress, which can become very difficult for other people in their life. Since people with nonverbal communication competence are already more likely to have larger social support networks, it is likely that they will be able to spread their emotional communication, specifically related to negative emotions, in ways that do not burden others. Unfortunately, since people with less nonverbal skill are likely to have smaller social networks, they may end up targeting one or two people for their emotional communication, which could lead the other people to withdraw from the relationship.

Expressing the need for support is also an important part of relational maintenance. People who lack nonverbal encoding skills may send unclear or subtle cues requesting support that are not picked up on by others, which can lead to increased feelings of loneliness. Skilled encoders of nonverbal messages, on the other hand, are able to appropriately communicate the need for support in recognizable ways. As relationships progress in terms of closeness and intimacy, nonverbal signals become a shorthand form of communicating, as information can be conveyed with a particular look, gesture, tone of voice, or posture. Family members, romantic couples, close friends, and close colleagues can bond over their familiarity with each other's nonverbal behaviors, which creates a shared relational reality that is unique to the relationship.

Nonverbal Communication in Professional Contexts

Surveys of current professionals and managers have found that most report that nonverbal skills are important to their jobs (DePaulo, 1992). Although important, there is rarely any training or instruction related to nonverbal communication, and a consistent issue that has been reported by employees has been difficulty with mixed messages coming from managers. Interpreting contradictory verbal and nonverbal messages is challenging in any context and can have negative effects on job

satisfaction and productivity. As a supervisor who gives positive and negative feedback regularly and/or in periodic performance evaluations, it is important to be able to match nonverbal signals with the content of the message. For example, appropriate nonverbal cues can convey the seriousness of a customer or coworker complaint, help ease the delivery of constructive criticism, or reinforce positive feedback. Professionals also need to be aware of how context, status, and power intersect with specific channels of nonverbal communication. For example, even casual touching of supervisees, mentees, or employees may be considered condescending or inappropriate in certain situations. A well-deserved pat on the back is different from an unnecessary hand on the shoulder to say hello at the start of a business meeting.



Figure 4.4.1: The nonverbal cues, such as the business attire worn by the attendees sitting at a conference table, tell us this is a formal business meeting. Everyone's posture, focused on the man at the head of the table, makes it clear that he is a person of authority. (Public Domain; National Archives and Records Administration via Wikimedia Commons)

In professional contexts, managers and mentors with nonverbal decoding skills can exhibit sensitivity to others' nonverbal behavior and better relate to employees and mentees. In general, interpreting emotions from nonverbal cues can have interpersonal and professional benefits. Aside from bringing financial rewards, nonverbal communication also helps create supportive climates. Bosses, supervisors, and service providers like therapists can help create rapport and a positive climate by consciously mirroring the nonverbal communication of their employees or clients. In addition, mirroring the nonverbal communication of others during a job interview, during a sales pitch, or during a performance evaluation can help put the other person at ease and establish rapport. Much of the mirroring we do is natural, so trying to overcompensate may actually be detrimental, but engaging in self-monitoring and making small adjustments could be beneficial (DePaulo, 1992).

You can also use nonverbal communication to bring positive attention to yourself. Being able to nonverbally encode turn-taking cues can allow people to contribute to conversations at relevant times, and getting an idea or a piece of information or feedback in at the right time can help bring attention to your professional competence. Being able to encode an appropriate amount of professionalism and enthusiasm during a job interview can also aid in desired impression formation since people make judgments about others' personalities based on their nonverbal cues. A person who comes across as too enthusiastic may be seen as pushy or fake, and a person who comes across as too relaxed may be seen as unprofessional and unmotivated.

Nonverbal Communication and Culture

As with other aspects of communication, norms for nonverbal communication vary from country to country and also among cultures within a particular country. We've already learned that some nonverbal communication behaviors appear to be somewhat innate because they are universally recognized. Two such universal signals are the "eyebrow flash" of recognition when we see someone we know and the open-hand, palm-up gesture that signals a person would like something or needs help (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Smiling is also a universal nonverbal behavior, but the triggers that lead a person to smile vary from culture to culture. The expansion of media, particularly from the United States and other Western countries around the world, is leading to more nonverbal similarities among cultures. However, the biggest cultural differences in nonverbal communication occur within the categories of eye contact, touch, and personal space (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Next, we will explore some interesting and instructive differences within several channels of nonverbal communication that we have discussed so far. As you read, remember that these are not absolute, in that nonverbal communication, like other forms of communication, is influenced by context and varies among individuals within a particular cultural group as well. We can even express our allegiances nonverbally. For instance, a football fan can demonstrate their allegiance without saying a word by wearing team colors or painting their face.



Figure 4.4.2: This sports fan's face painted in the colors of her team shows her allegiance to the team's fan culture without saying a word. (CC0 1.0 Universal; Keith JJ on Pixabay via Wikimedia Commons)

Kinesics

Cultural variations in the way we gesture, use head movements, and make eye contact fall under the nonverbal category of kinesics. Let's take each category in turn and look at some of these cultural differences.

Gestures

Remember that emblems are gestures that correspond to a word and an agreed-upon meaning. When we use our fingers to count, we are using emblematic gestures, but even our way of counting varies among cultures (Pease & Pease, 2004). I could fairly accurately separate British people and U.S. Americans from French, Greek, and German people based on a simple and common gesture.

Try This 4.4.1 Gestures Can Reveal Culture

Let's try this exercise: First, display with your hand the number 'five'. Second, keeping the 'five' displayed, change it to a 'two'. If you are from the United States or Britain, you are probably holding up your index and middle fingers. If you are from another European country, you are probably holding up your thumb and index finger. While Americans and Brits start counting on their index finger and end with five on their thumb, other Europeans start counting on their thumb and end with five on their pinky finger.

How you use your hands can also get you into trouble if you're unaware of cultural differences (Pease & Pease, 2004). For example, the "thumbs up" gesture, as we just learned, can mean "one" in mainland Europe, but it can have an insulting meaning in Greece (when thrust forward) and is recognized as a signal for hitchhiking or "good," "good job/way to go," or "OK" in many other cultures. Two hands up with the palms out can signal "ten" in many Western countries and is recognized as a signal for "I'm telling the truth" or "I surrender" in many cultures. The same action, however, is even more insulting in Greece than giving the "thumbs up" gesture described above. So, using that familiar gesture to say you surrender might actually end up escalating rather than ending a conflict if used in Greece.



Figure 4.4.3: These three professionals, based in Japan and attending a conference in Singapore, hold up two fingers in a "V" showing their solidarity in a common message to the camera. This gesture is now nearly universally understood to mean peace or victory. (CC BY-SA 4.0 International; Exec 8 via Wikimedia Commons)

Head Movements

Bowing is a nonverbal greeting ritual that is more common in East Asian cultures than Western cultures, but the head nod, which is a common form of acknowledgment in many cultures, is actually an abbreviated bow. Japan is considered a **noncontact culture**, which refers to cultural groups in which people stand farther apart while talking, make less eye contact, and touch less during regular interactions. As a result, bowing is the preferred nonverbal greeting over handshaking. Bows vary based on status, with higher status people bowing the least. For example, in order to indicate the status of another person, a Japanese businessperson may bow deeply. An interesting ritual associated with the bow is the exchange of business cards when greeting someone in Japan. This exchange allows each person to view the other's occupation and title, which provides useful information about the other's status and determines who should bow more. Since bowing gives each person a good view of the other person's shoes, it is very important to have clean shoes that are in good condition, since they play an important part in initial impression formation.

Eye Contact

In some cultures, avoiding eye contact is considered a sign of respect. Such **eye-contact aversion**, however, could be seen as a sign that the other person is being deceptive, is bored, or is being rude. Some indigenous nations teach that people should avoid eye contact with elders, teachers, and other people with status. This can create issues in classrooms when teachers are unaware of this norm and may consider an indigenous nation student's lack of eye contact as a sign of insubordination or lack of engagement, which could lead to false impressions that the student is a troublemaker or less intelligent.

Haptics

As we've learned, touch behaviors are important during initial interactions, and cultural differences in these nonverbal practices can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. Shaking hands as a typical touch greeting, for example, varies among cultures (Pease & Pease, 2004). It is customary for British, Australian, German, and U.S. American colleagues to shake hands when seeing each other for the first time and then to shake again when departing the company. In the United States, colleagues do not normally shake hands again if they see each other again later in the day, but European colleagues may shake hands with each other several times a day. Once a certain level of familiarity and closeness is reached, U.S. American colleagues will likely not even shake hands daily unless engaging in some more formal interaction, but many European colleagues will continue to shake hands each time they see each other. Some French businesspeople have been known to spend up to thirty minutes a day shaking hands. The squeezes and up-and-down shakes used during handshakes are often called "pumps," and the number of pumps used in a handshake also varies among cultures. Although the Germans and French shake hands more often throughout the day, they typically only give one or two pumps and then hold the shake for a couple of seconds before letting go. Brits tend to give three to five pumps, and U.S. Americans tend to give five to seven pumps. This can be humorous to watch at a multinational

business event, but it also affects the initial impressions people make of each other. A U.S. American may think that a German is being unfriendly or distant because of their single-hand pump, while a German may think that a U.S. American is overdoing it with seven.

Contact cultures are cultural groups in which people stand closer together, engage in more eye contact, touch more frequently, and speak more loudly. Italians are especially known for their vibrant nonverbal communication in terms of gestures, volume, eye contact, and touching, which not surprisingly places them in the contact culture category. Italians use hand motions and touching to regulate the flow of conversations. When non-Italians don't know how to mirror an Italian's nonverbals, they may not get to contribute much to the conversation, which likely feeds into the stereotype of Italians as domineering in conversations or overexpressive. For example, Italians speak with their hands raised as a way to signal that they are holding the floor for their conversational turn. If their conversational partner starts to raise their hands, the Italian might gently touch the other person and keep on talking. Conversational partners often interpret this as a sign of affection or of the Italian's passion for what they are saying. In fact, it is a touch intended to keep the partner from raising their hands, which would signal that the Italian's conversational turn is over and the other person now has the floor. It has been suggested that in order to get a conversational turn, you must physically grab their hands in midair and pull them down. While this would seem very invasive and rude to northern Europeans and U.S. Americans, it is a nonverbal norm in Italian culture and may be the only way to contribute to a conversation (Pease & Pease, 2004).



Figure 4.4.4: Since the man and woman on the left are sitting so close that their arms are touching, they are in one another's intimate space. In some cultures, this demonstration of haptics or touch would not be acceptable according to cultural norms between men and women. (CC BY 3.0 Unported; Alanvi (talk) (uploads) via Wikimedia Commons)

Vocalics

The volume at which we speak is influenced by specific contexts and is more generally influenced by our culture. In European countries like France, England, Sweden, and Germany, it is not uncommon to find restaurants that have small tables very close together. In many cases, two people dining together may be sitting at a table that is actually touching the table of another pair of diners. Most U.S. Americans would consider this a violation of personal space, and Europeans often perceive U.S. Americans to be rude in such contexts because they do not control the volume of their conversations as much. Since personal space is usually more plentiful in the United States, Americans are used to speaking at a level that is considered too loud to many cultures that are used to less personal space. And this can lead to misunderstanding and frustration on both sides. For instance, a group of Americans may be asked to leave a restaurant in Sweden because another table complains that they are being too loud. The Americans are offended, and the Swedes are annoyed. Cultural insensitivity to proxemics and vocalics can combine to make for troubling, but hopefully informative, nonverbal intercultural encounters. To avoid this scenario, as Americans, whether we are dining in Sweden or Argentina, where personal space is smaller and so the volume of speaking in a public place like a restaurant is lower, we need to be aware of the cultural norms of our environment.

Proxemics

Cultural norms for personal space vary much more than some other nonverbal communication channels, such as facial expressions, which have more universal similarity and recognizability. We've already learned that contact and noncontact cultures differ in their preferences for touch and interpersonal distance. And as demonstrated in Figure 4.4.4, proxemics norms between genders can vary by culture. Countries in South America and southern Europe exhibit characteristics of contact cultures, while countries in northern Europe and Southeast Asia exhibit the noncontact culture characteristics. Because of the different comfort levels with personal space, a Guatemalan and a Canadian might come away with differing impressions of each other because of proxemic differences. The Guatemalan may feel the Canadian is standoffish, and the Canadian may feel the Guatemalan is pushy or aggressive.

Chronemics

The United States and many northern and western European countries have a monochronic orientation to time, meaning time is seen as a commodity that can be budgeted, saved, spent, and wasted. Events are to be scheduled in advance and have set beginning and ending times. Countries like Spain and Mexico have a polychronic orientation to time. Appointments may be scheduled at overlapping times, making an "orderly" schedule impossible. People may also miss appointments or deadlines without offering an apology, which would be considered very rude by a person with a monochronic orientation to time. People from cultures with a monochronic orientation to time are frustrated when people from polychronic cultures cancel appointments or close businesses for family obligations. Conversely, people from polychronic cultures feel that U.S. Americans, for example, follow their schedules at the expense of personal relationships (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Nonverbal Communication and Gender

Gender and communication scholar Kathryn Dindia contests the notion that men and women are from different planets and instead uses another analogy. She says men are from South Dakota and women are from North Dakota. Although the states border each other and are similar in many ways, state pride and in-group identifications lead the people of South Dakota to perceive themselves as different from the people of North Dakota and vice versa. But if we expand our perspective and take the position of someone from California or Illinois, North Dakotans and South Dakotans are pretty much alike (Andersen, 1999). This comparison is intended to point out that in our daily lives, we do experience men and women to be fairly different, but when we look at the differences between men and women compared to the differences between humans and other creatures, men and women are much more similar than different. For example, in terms of nonverbal communication, men and women all over the world make similar facial expressions and can recognize those facial expressions in one another. We use similar eye contact patterns, gestures, and, within cultural groups, have similar notions of the use of time and space. It's important to understand how gender influences communication, but it's also important to remember that in terms of communication, men and women are about 99 percent similar and 1 percent different.

Gender Differences in Kinesics

Although men and women are mostly similar in terms of nonverbal communication, we can gain a better understanding of the role that gender plays in influencing our social realities by exploring some of the channel-specific differences (Andersen, 1999). While we've already covered some of these areas in a general way, let's focus on some gender differences in how men and women use gestures, posture, eye contact, and facial expressions.

Gestures

- Women use more gestures in regular conversation than do men, but men tend to use larger gestures than women when they do use them.
- Men are, however, more likely to use physical adaptors like restless foot and hand movements, probably because girls are socialized to avoid such movements because they are not "ladylike."

Posture

- Men are more likely to lean in during an interaction than are women.
- Women are more likely to have a face-to-face body orientation while interacting than are men.

Women's tendency to use a face-to-face body orientation influences the general conclusion that women are better at sending and receiving nonverbal messages than men. Women's more direct visual engagement during interactions allows them to take in more nonverbal cues, which allows them to better reflect on and more accurately learn from experience what particular nonverbal cues mean in what contexts.

Eye Contact

- In general, women make more eye contact than men. As we learned, women use face-to-face body orientations in conversations more often than men, which likely facilitates more sustained eye contact.
- Overall, women tend to do more looking and get looked at more than men.

Facial Expressions

- Women reveal emotion through facial expressions more frequently and more accurately than men.
- Men are more likely than women to exhibit angry facial expressions.

Men are often socialized to believe it is important to hide their emotions. This is especially evident in the case of smiling, with women smiling more than men. This also contributes to the stereotype that women are more emotionally aware and nurturing because people generally perceive those who express positive emotions as warmer and more likable. Gender socialization plays a role in facial displays as girls are typically rewarded for emotional displays, especially positive ones, and boys are rewarded when they conceal emotions—for instance, when they are told to "suck it up," "take it like a man," or "show sportsmanship" by not gloating or celebrating openly.

Haptics

There are as many gender differences in haptics as there are between cultures.

Gender Differences in Haptics

- Although it is often assumed that men touch women more than women touch men, this hasn't been a consistent research finding. In fact, differences in touch in cross-gender interactions are very small.
- Women do engage in more touching when interacting with same-gender conversational partners than do men.
- In general, men tend to read more sexual intent into touch than do women, who often underinterpret sexual intent (Andersen, 1999).

There is a touch taboo for men in the United States. In fact, research supports the claim that men's aversion to same-gender touching is higher in the United States than in other cultures, which shows that this taboo is culturally relative. For example, seeing two adult men holding hands in public in Saudi Arabia would signal that the men are close friends and equals, but it wouldn't signal that they are sexually attracted to each other (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The touch taboo also extends to cross-gender interactions in certain contexts. It's important to be aware of the potential interpretations of touch, especially as they relate to sexual and aggressive interpretations.

Vocalics

In vocalics, too, there can be gender differences.

Gender Differences in Vocalics

- Women are socialized to use more vocal variety, which adds to the stereotype that women are more expressive than men.
- In terms of pitch, women tend more than men to end their sentences with an upward inflection of pitch, which implies a lack of certainty, even when there isn't.

A biological difference between men and women is vocal pitch: men's voices are lower-pitched, and women's are higher-pitched. Varying degrees of importance and social meaning are then placed on these biological differences, which lead some men and women to consciously or unconsciously exaggerate the difference. Men may speak in a lower register than they would naturally, and women may speak in more soft, breathy tones to accentuate the pitch differences. These ways of speaking often start as a conscious choice after adolescence to better fit into socially and culturally proscribed gender performances. Still, they can become so ingrained that people spend the rest of their lives speaking in a voice that is a modified version of their natural tone.

Proxemics

Let's take a look at the gender differences in proxemics.

Gender Differences in Proxemics

- Men are implicitly socialized to take up as much space as possible, and women are explicitly socialized to take up less space.
- In terms of interpersonal distance, research shows that women interact in closer proximity to one another than do men.
- Men do not respond as well as women in situations involving crowding. High-density environments evoke more negative feelings from men, which can even lead to physical violence in very crowded settings.

Men are generally larger than women, which is a biological difference that gains social and cultural meaning when certain behaviors and norms are associated with it. For example, women are told to sit in a "ladylike" way, which usually means to cross and/or close their legs and keep their limbs close to their body. Men, on the other hand, sprawl out in casual, professional, and formal situations without their use of space being reprimanded or even noticed in many cases.

If you'll recall our earlier discussion of personal space, we identified two subzones within the personal zone that extend from 1.5 to 4 feet from our body. Men seem to be more comfortable with casual and social interactions that are in the outer subzone, which is 2.5 to 4 feet away, meaning men prefer to interact at an arm's length from another person. This also plays into the stereotypes of women as more intimate and nurturing and men as more distant and less intimate.

Self-Presentation

The gender differences in nonverbal communication can even extend to how men and women present themselves to others.

Gender Differences in Self-Presentation

- Men and women present themselves differently, with women, in general, accentuating their physical attractiveness more and men accentuating signs of their status and wealth more.
- Men and women may engage in **self-presentation** that exaggerates existing biological differences between male and female bodies.

Most people want to present themselves in ways that accentuate their attractiveness, at least in some situations where impression management is important to fulfill certain instrumental, relational, or identity needs. Gender socialization over many years has influenced how we present ourselves in terms of attractiveness. Research shows that women's physical attractiveness is more important to men than men's physical attractiveness is to women. Women do take physical attractiveness into account, but a man's social status and wealth have been shown to be more important.

Men and women also exaggerate biological and socially based sex and gender differences on their own. In terms of biology, men's and women's bodies are generally different, which contributes to the nonverbal area related to personal appearance. Many men and women choose clothing that accentuates these bodily differences. For example, women may accentuate their curves with specific clothing choices, and men may accentuate their size, for example, by wearing a suit with shoulder padding to enhance the appearance of broad shoulders. These choices vary in terms of the level of consciousness at which they are made. Men are also hairier than women, and although it isn't always the case and grooming varies by culture, many women shave their legs and remove body hair while men may grow beards or go to great lengths to reverse baldness to accentuate these differences. Of course, the more recent trend of "manscaping" now has some men trimming or removing body hair from their chests, arms, and/

or legs.

Key Takeaways

- A central function of nonverbal communication is the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Nonverbal communication helps initiate relationships through impression management and self-disclosure, and then helps maintain relationships as it aids in emotional expressions that request and give emotional support.
- Professionals generally see nonverbal communication as an important part of their jobs. Paying attention to nonverbal signals can aid leaders in helping employees who are under stress and need support. An awareness of the importance of nonverbal communication helps with impression management in professional settings, such as in encoding an appropriate amount of enthusiasm and professionalism.
- Although some of our nonverbal signals appear to be more innate and culturally universal, many others vary considerably among cultures, especially in terms of the use of space, eye contact, and touch.
- Rather than learning a list of rules for cultural variations in nonverbal cues, develop a more general knowledge about how nonverbal norms vary based on cultural values and view this knowledge as tools that can be adapted for use in many different cultural contexts.
- Though research has found some differences, most of the nonverbal differences between men and women are exaggerations of biological differences onto which we have imposed certain meanings and values. Men's and women's nonverbal communication, as with other aspects of communication, is much more similar than different.

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4.5: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

Nonverbal communication is the way we send messages without using words. We do this through our body movements, facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, touch, and the space around us. These signals often convey more meaning than the words we speak and can show emotions, attitudes, and intentions. While verbal communication relies mostly on sound, nonverbal communication can involve all five senses, making it a powerful way to express ourselves and understand others. For example, a smile, a nod, or a gentle touch can communicate friendliness, support, or agreement without saying a single word.

Nonverbal communication can reinforce, replace, or contradict what we say depending on how it's used. Gestures, facial expressions, and vocal tone can strengthen our words, while sometimes a look, gesture, or posture can completely substitute for speech. On the other hand, when our words and nonverbal cues send mixed messages, people tend to trust the nonverbal signals more. Because many nonverbal cues are unconscious or difficult to control, they often reveal our true feelings and intentions, which makes them seem more genuine and credible. Micro-expressions, which are very brief, involuntary facial expressions, are an example of this “honest” nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication also plays a key role in relationships. It helps us connect with others, show intimacy, express emotions, and maintain social bonds. Tie signs, such as holding hands, and immediacy behaviors, like smiling and making eye contact, help people feel close and engaged. Skilled nonverbal communicators are better at creating rapport, reading others’ emotions, and maintaining positive interactions. This skill is important not only in personal relationships but also in professional settings, where matching nonverbal cues with messages can improve credibility, communication, and social influence.

Finally, nonverbal communication is multichannel and context-dependent. We rarely send a single nonverbal cue, but rather, our gestures, posture, facial expressions, and tone usually work together in clusters. These clusters can either reinforce meaning or create ambiguity, depending on how well they match. By becoming more aware of our own nonverbal signals and learning to interpret others’, we can communicate more effectively, manage emotions, influence social interactions, and strengthen both personal and professional relationships. In short, nonverbal communication is an essential part of how humans connect, express themselves, and understand each other.

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4.6: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 4

Table 4.5.1: Vocal and Nonvocal Elements of Communication

A table displaying two rows and two columns. The left column in the top row features examples of 'vocal' aspects of verbal communication. These are audible and comprehensible, such as spoken words. The right column in the top row features 'nonvocal' aspects of verbal communication. This is verbal communication that is not delivered in words, but is audible through 'paralanguage', which is the pitch, speaking rate, and volume of the voice.

The left column in the bottom row features examples of 'vocal' aspects of nonverbal communication, such as writing and sign language. The right column in the bottom row features 'nonvocal' aspects of verbal communication, which are not audible but visible, such as body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures.

Figure 4.6.7: Proxemic Zones of Personal Space

A graphic showing four eccentric circles, each one larger than the one before it. The circles depict proxemic space ranges in relationships. The smallest circle shows the intimate space range, which is 0' to 1.5'. The next outer circle shows Personal Space range, which is 1.5' to 4'. The next outer circle shows Social Space, which is 4' to 12'. The last outer circle represents Public Space, which is 12 feet or more in distance.

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4.8: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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4.8.1: Exercises

4.1: Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

1. Getting integrated: To better understand nonverbal communication, try to think of an example to illustrate each of the four principles discussed in the chapter. Be integrative in your approach by including at least one example from an academic, professional, civic, and personal context.
2. When someone sends you a mixed message in which the verbal and nonverbal messages contradict each other, which one do you place more meaning on? Why?
3. Our personal presentation, style of dress, and surroundings, such as a dorm room, apartment, car, or office, send nonverbal messages about our identities. Analyze some of the nonverbal signals that your personal presentation or environment sends. What do they say about who you are? Do they create the impression that you desire?

4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

1. Provide some examples of how eye contact plays a role in your communication throughout the day.
2. One of the key functions of vocalics is to add emphasis to our verbal messages to influence the meaning. Provide a meaning for each of the following statements based on which word is emphasized: "*She* is my friend." "She is *my* friend." "She is my *friend*."
3. Getting integrated: Many people do not think of time as an important part of our nonverbal communication. Provide an example of how chronemics sends nonverbal messages in academic settings, professional settings, and personal settings.

4.3: Nonverbal Communication Competence

1. Record yourself during a 2–3 minute conversation or presentation. Identify examples of gestures, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact. Note any incongruences between verbal and nonverbal messages and adjust one behavior to improve congruence.
2. Pair up with a friend or classmate. During a 5-minute conversation, consciously mirror their posture, gestures, or tone while maintaining natural interaction. Reflect afterward on how it influenced rapport, comfort, and communication flow.
3. Observe a social interaction (e.g., café, classroom, meeting). Identify clusters of nonverbal behaviors (posture, gestures, eye contact). Interpret what these cues might indicate, considering context, individual differences, and cultural norms. Compare your interpretation with any verbal cues to check for congruence.

4.4: Nonverbal Communication in Context

1. Identify some nonverbal behaviors that would signal a positive interaction on a first date and on a job interview. Then identify some nonverbal behaviors that would signal a negative interaction in each of those contexts.
2. Research nonverbal norms in a culture different from your own, focusing on spatial preferences, eye contact practices, and vocalics. Reflect on how these cultural differences may influence communication styles and interpersonal relationships. Consider how you could adapt your nonverbal communication to bridge cultural gaps effectively.
3. Reflect on your own cultural background and its influence on your perceptions of time and scheduling. Consider how your attitudes towards time management, punctuality, and time allocation are the same or are different from the cultural norms of those around you. How might these cultural differences impact your communication style and interactions with individuals from cultures with contrasting views on time? How can cultural awareness enhance cross-cultural understanding and collaboration?

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4.8.2: Discussion Questions

4.1: Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

1. Recall a teacher you have had who exhibited effective immediacy behaviors. Recall a teacher you have had who didn't exhibit immediacy behaviors. Make a column for each teacher and note examples of specific behaviors of each. Discuss your list with a classmate and compare and contrast your lists.
2. Think about the teachers that you listed in the previous question. Discuss how their behaviors affected your learning and your relationship.
3. How much should immediacy behaviors, relative to other characteristics such as professionalism, experience, training, and content knowledge, factor into the evaluation of teachers by their students, peers, and supervisors? What, if anything, should schools do to enhance teachers' knowledge of immediacy behaviors?

4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

1. What is an example of eye contact that you find personally unsettling? Why does it make you nervous to see this type of eye contact?
2. In terms of chronemics, are you a polychronic person, monochronic, or somewhere in the middle?
3. Describe an avatar that you have created for yourself. What led you to construct the avatar the way you did, and how do you think your choices reflect your typical nonverbal self-presentation?

4.3: Nonverbal Communication Competence

1. How does monitoring and controlling your nonverbal behavior affect first impressions, interpersonal rapport, and perceived credibility in different social or professional contexts?
2. What is the role of mirroring and immediacy behaviors in building connections, and how might cultural differences influence the interpretation of these behaviors?
3. Why is it difficult to accurately detect deception through nonverbal cues alone, and how do factors like nonverbal leakage, truth bias, and self-monitoring contribute to misinterpretation?

4.4: Nonverbal Communication in Context

1. Discuss an experience where you have had some kind of miscommunication or misunderstanding because of cultural or gender differences in encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. What did you learn in this chapter that could help you in similar future interactions?
2. How does nonverbal communication play a role in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships in professional settings? Discuss the significance of nonverbal cues in impression management, emotional expressions, and providing support within workplace interactions.
3. How does the cultural concept of chronemics influence communication dynamics and interpersonal relationships in diverse cultural settings? Discuss the role of time perception, punctuality norms, and expectations in shaping nonverbal communication practices across different cultures. How can an understanding of chronemics enhance cross-cultural communication and promote cultural sensitivity in professional and personal interactions?

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5: LISTENING

Overview

When people think of communication, speaking is almost always the first skill that comes to mind. But an enormous component is actually listening. Speaking and listening are the yin and yang of communication; they are interdependent and must coexist within the framework of the communication model in order for meaningful communication to occur. This chapter explores the nuanced art of listening by defining the concept, distinguishing hearing from listening, and examining the critical role that memory plays in the listening process. It also introduces the various types of listening and listening styles, highlighting why some individuals focus primarily on the content of the message being delivered while others are more interested in the well-being of the people delivering the messages.

The chapter also examines common barriers that interfere with effective listening, including internal and external noise, personal biases, emotional frustration, fatigue, and the increasing occurrence of multitasking in our fast-paced, technology-driven world. Additional attention is given to ineffective listening behaviors such as interrupting, eavesdropping, and aggressive listening, all of which can prove damaging, especially in interpersonal relationships. The chapter concludes with some practical strategies to improve listening competence and create 'listenable' messages

Chapter Goals

- Discuss the four main types of listening.
- Discuss some of the environmental and physical barriers to effective listening.
- Identify strategies for improving listening competence at each stage of the listening process.
- Apply critical-listening skills in interpersonal, educational, and mediated contexts.
- Discuss ways to improve listening competence in relational, professional, and cultural contexts.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Acronyms
- Action-Oriented Listeners
- Active Listening
- Active-Empathetic Listening
- Aggressive Listening
- Barriers
- Cognitive Barriers
- Content-Oriented Listeners
- Covert Coaching
- Covert Questioning
- Critical Listening
- Difference Between Speech and Thought Rate
- Discriminative Listening
- Eavesdropping
- Empathetic Listening
- Environmental Barriers
- Evaluating
- Hearing
- Informational Listening

- Inferences
- Interpreting
- Internal Dialogue
- Listening
- Listening Environment
- The Listening Process
- Media Multitasking
- Mental Bracketing
- Mirroring
- Narcissistic Listening
- Noise
- People-Oriented Listeners
- Personal Barriers
- Physical Barriers
- Physiological Noise
- Prejudice
- Pseudo-Listening
- Recalling
- Receiving
- Responding
- Response Preparation
- Rhyme
- Self-Reinforcement
- Visualization

5.1: Understanding How and Why We Listen

5.2: Barriers to Effective Listening

5.3: Improving Listening Competence

5.4: Listenable Messages and Effective Feedback

5.5: Chapter Wrap-Up

5.6: References

5.7: Teacher Resources

5.7.1: Exercises

5.7.2: Discussion Questions

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5.1: Understanding How and Why We Listen

Listening Defined

Listening is the learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. We begin to engage with the listening process long before we engage in any recognizable verbal or nonverbal communication. It is only after listening for months as infants that we begin to consciously practice our own forms of expression. In this section, we will learn more about each stage of the listening process, the main types of listening, and the main listening styles.

The Listening Process

Listening is a process and, as such, doesn't have a defined start and finish. Like the communication process, listening has cognitive, behavioral, and relational elements and doesn't unfold in a linear, step-by-step fashion. Models of processes are informative in that they help us visualize specific components, but keep in mind that they do not capture the speed, overlapping nature, or overall complexity of the actual process in action. The stages of the listening process are receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding.

Receiving

Before we can engage in other steps in the listening process, we must take in stimuli through our senses. In any given communication encounter, it is likely that we will return to the receiving stage many times as we process incoming feedback and new messages. This part of the listening process is more physiological than other parts, which include cognitive and relational elements. We primarily take in information needed for listening through auditory and visual channels. Although we don't often think about visual cues as a part of listening, they influence how we interpret messages. For example, seeing a person's face when we hear their voice allows us to take in nonverbal cues from facial expressions and eye contact. The fact that these visual cues are missing in e-mail, text, and phone interactions presents some difficulties for reading contextual clues into meaning received through only auditory channels.



Figure 5.1.1: The first stage of the listening process is receiving stimuli through auditory and visual channels. The popular park game seen here is played by children and puts into practice these first-stage listening skills. (CC BY 2.0; Britt Reints via Flickr)

There are numerous ways that incoming stimuli may be filtered. These perceptual filters also play a role in listening. Some stimuli never make it in, some are filtered into subconsciousness, and others are filtered into various levels of consciousness based on their salience. Recall that salience is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context and that we

tend to find salient things that are visually or audibly stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Think about how it's much easier to listen to a lecture on a subject that you find very interesting.

It is important to consider **noise** as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with **hearing,** which is the physical process of receiving stimuli through internal and external components of the ears and eyes, and some interferes with listening, which is the cognitive process of processing the stimuli taken in during hearing. While hearing leads to listening, they are not the same thing. Environmental noise, such as other people talking, the sounds of traffic, and music, interferes with the physiological aspects of hearing. Psychological noise like stress and anger interferes primarily with the cognitive processes of listening. We can enhance our ability to receive, and in turn listen, by trying to minimize noise.

Interpreting

During the interpreting stage of listening, we combine the visual and auditory information we receive and try to make meaning out of that information using schemata. The interpreting stage engages cognitive and relational processing as we take in informational, contextual, and relational cues and try to connect them in meaningful ways to previous experiences. It is through the interpreting stage that we may begin to understand the stimuli we have received. When we understand something, we are able to attach meaning by connecting information to previous experiences. Through the process of comparing new information with old information, we may also update or revise particular schemata if we find the new information relevant and credible. If we have difficulty interpreting information, meaning we don't have previous experience or information in our existing schemata to make sense of it, then it is difficult to transfer the information into our long-term memory for later recall. In situations where understanding the information we receive isn't important or isn't a goal, this stage may be fairly short or even skipped. After all, we can move something to our long-term memory by repetition and then later recall it without ever having understood it. I remember earning perfect scores on exams in my anatomy class in college because I was able to memorize and recall, for example, all the organs in the digestive system. In fact, I might still be able to do that now, over a decade later. But neither then nor now could I tell you the significance or function of most of those organs, meaning I didn't really get to a level of understanding but simply stored the information for later recall.

Recalling

Our ability to recall information is dependent on some of the physiological limits of how memory works. Overall, our memories are known to be fallible. We forget about half of what we hear immediately after hearing it, recall 35 percent after eight hours, and recall 20 percent after a day (Hargie, 2011). Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Hargie, 2011).

Our sensory storage is very large in terms of capacity but limited in terms of length of storage. We can hold large amounts of unsorted visual information,n but only for about a tenth of a second. By comparison, we can hold large amounts of unsorted auditory information for longer—up to four seconds. This initial memory storage unit doesn't provide much use for our study of communication, as these large but quickly expiring chunks of sensory data are primarily used in reactionary and instinctual ways.

As stimuli are organized and interpreted, they make their way to short-term memory, where they either expire and are forgotten or are transferred to long-term memory. Short-term memory is a mental storage capability that can retain stimuli for twenty seconds to one minute. Long-term memory is a mental storage capability to which stimuli in short-term memory can be transferred if they are connected to existing schema and in which information can be stored indefinitely (Hargie, 2011). Working memory is a temporarily accessed memory storage space that is activated during times of high cognitive demand. When using working memory, we can temporarily store information and process and use it at the same time. This is different from our typical memory function in that information usually has to make it to long-term memory before we can call it back up to apply to a current situation. People with good working memories are able to keep recent information in mind, process it, and apply it to other incoming information. This can be very useful during high-stress situations. A person in control of a command center like the White House Situation Room should have a good working memory in order to take in, organize, evaluate, and then immediately use new information instead of having to wait for that information to make it to long-term memory and then be retrieved and used.

Although recall is an important part of the listening process, there isn't a direct correlation between being good at recalling information and being a good listener. Some people have excellent memories and recall abilities and can tell you a very accurate story from many years earlier during a situation in which they should actually be listening and not showing off their recall abilities. Recall is an important part of the listening process because it is most often used to assess listening abilities and effectiveness. Many quizzes and tests in school are based on recall and are often used to assess how well students comprehended information

presented in class, which is seen as an indication of how well they listened. When recall is our only goal, we excel at it. Experiments have found that people can memorize and later recall a set of faces and names with near 100 percent recall when sitting in a quiet lab and asked to do so. But throw in external noise, more visual stimuli, and multiple contextual influences, and we can't remember the name of the person we were just introduced to one minute earlier. Even in interpersonal encounters, we rely on recall to test whether or not someone was listening. Imagine that Azam is talking to his friend Belle, who is sitting across from him in a restaurant booth. Azam, annoyed that Belle keeps checking her phone, stops and asks, "Are you listening?" Belle inevitably replies, "Yes," since we rarely fess up to our poor listening habits, and Azam replies, "Well, what did I just say?"

Evaluating

When we evaluate something, we make judgments about its credibility, completeness, and worth. In terms of credibility, we try to determine the degree to which we believe a speaker's statements are correct and/or true. In terms of completeness, we try to "read between the lines" and evaluate the message in relation to what we know about the topic or situation being discussed. We evaluate the worth of a message by making a value judgment about whether we think the message or idea is good/bad, right/wrong, or desirable/undesirable. All these aspects of evaluating require critical thinking skills, which we aren't born with but must develop over time through our own personal and intellectual development.

Studying communication is a great way to build your critical thinking skills because you learn much more about the taken-for-granted aspects of how communication works, which gives you tools to analyze and critique messages, senders, and contexts. Critical thinking and listening skills also help you take a more proactive role in the communication process rather than being a passive receiver of messages that may not be credible, complete, or worthwhile. One danger within the evaluation stage of listening is to focus your evaluative lenses more on the speaker than the message. This can quickly become a barrier to effective listening if we begin to prejudge a speaker based on his or her identity or characteristics rather than on the content of his or her message. We will learn more about how to avoid slipping into a person-centered rather than message-centered evaluative stance later in the chapter.

Responding

Responding entails sending verbal and nonverbal messages that indicate attentiveness and understanding or a lack thereof. From our earlier discussion of the communication model, you may be able to connect this part of the listening process to feedback. Later, we will learn more specifics about how to encode and decode the verbal and nonverbal cues sent during the responding stage, but we all know from experience some signs that indicate whether a person is paying attention and understanding a message or not.

We send verbal and nonverbal feedback while another person is talking and after they are done. Back-channel cues are the verbal and nonverbal signals we send while someone is talking and can consist of verbal cues like "uh-huh," "oh," and "right," and/or nonverbal cues like direct eye contact, head nods, and leaning forward. Back-channel cues are generally a form of positive feedback that indicates others are actively listening. People also send cues intentionally and unintentionally that indicate they aren't listening. If another person is looking away, fidgeting, texting, or turned away, we will likely interpret those responses negatively.

Paraphrasing is a responding behavior that can also show that you understand what was communicated. When you paraphrase information, you rephrase the message into your own words. For example, you might say the following to start a paraphrased response: "What I heard you say was..." or "It seems like you're saying..." You can also ask clarifying questions to get more information. It is often a good idea to pair a paraphrase with a question to keep a conversation flowing. For example, you might pose the following paraphrase and question pair: "It seems like you believe you were treated unfairly. Is that right?" Or you might ask a standalone question like "What did your boss do that made you think he was 'playing favorites?'" Make sure to paraphrase and/or ask questions once a person's turn is over, because interrupting can also be interpreted as a sign of not listening. Paraphrasing is also a good tool to use in computer-mediated communication, especially since miscommunication can occur due to a lack of nonverbal and other contextual cues.



Figure 5.1.2: Listeners respond to speakers nonverbally during a discussion by using back-channel cues and verbally by using paraphrasing and asking clarifying questions. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; Duane Storey via Flickr)

The Importance of Listening

Understanding how listening works provides the foundation we need to explore why we listen, including various types and styles of listening. In general, listening helps us achieve all the communication goals (physical, instrumental, relational, and identity) that we learned about in the chapter titled “Introduction to Communication Studies”. Listening is also important in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

In terms of academics, poor listening skills were shown to contribute significantly to failure in a person’s first year of college (Zabava & Wolvin, 1993). In general, students with high scores for listening ability have greater academic achievement. Interpersonal communication skills, including listening, are also highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010).

Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Even though listening education is lacking in our society, research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving (DiSalvo, 1980). Training and improvements in listening will continue to pay off, as employers desire employees with good communication skills, and employees who have good listening skills are more likely to get promoted.

Listening also has implications for our personal lives and relationships. We shouldn’t underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can help us expand our self- and social awareness by learning from other people’s experiences and by helping us take on different perspectives. Emotional support in the form of empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help relational partners manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). The following list reviews some of the main functions of listening that are relevant in multiple contexts.

The main purposes of listening are: (Hargie, 2011)

- to focus on messages sent by other people or noises coming from our surroundings;
- to better our understanding of other people’s communication;
- to critically evaluate other people’s messages;
- to monitor nonverbal signals;
- to indicate that we are interested or paying attention;
- to empathize with others and show we care for them (relational maintenance); and
- to engage in negotiation, dialogue, or other exchanges that result in shared understanding of or agreement on an issue.

Listening Types

Listening serves many purposes, and different situations require different types of listening. The type of listening we engage in affects our communication and how others respond to us. For example, when we listen to empathize with others, our communication will likely be supportive and open, which will then lead the other person to feel "heard" and supported and hopefully view the interaction positively (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic (Watson, Barker, & Weaver III, 1995).

Discriminative Listening

Discriminative listening is a focused and usually instrumental type of listening that is primarily physiological and occurs mostly at the receiving stage of the listening process. Here we engage in listening to scan and monitor our surroundings in order to isolate particular auditory or visual stimuli. For example, we may focus our listening on a dark part of the yard while walking the dog at night to determine if the noise we just heard presents us with any danger. Or we may look for a particular nonverbal cue to let us know our conversational partner received our message (Hargie, 2011). In the absence of a hearing impairment, we have an innate and physiological ability to engage in discriminative listening. Although this is the most basic form of listening, it provides the foundation on which more intentional listening skills are built. This type of listening can be refined and honed. Think of how musicians, singers, and mechanics exercise specialized discriminative listening to isolate specific aural stimuli and how actors, detectives, and sculptors discriminate visual cues that allow them to analyze, make meaning from, or recreate nuanced behavior (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993).

Informational Listening

Informational listening entails listening to comprehend and retain information. This type of listening is not evaluative and is common in teaching and learning contexts ranging from a student listening to an informative speech to an out-of-towner listening to directions to the nearest gas station. We also use informational listening when we listen to news reports, voice mail, and briefings at work. Since retention and recall are important components of informational listening, good concentration and memory skills are key. These also happen to be skills that many college students struggle with, at least in the first years of college, but will be expected to have mastered once they get into professional contexts. In many professional contexts, informational listening is important, especially when receiving instructions. I caution my students that they will be expected to process verbal instructions more frequently in their profession than they are in college. Most college professors provide detailed instructions and handouts with assignments so students can review them as needed, but many supervisors and managers will expect you to take the initiative to remember or record vital information. Additionally, many bosses are not as open to questions or requests to repeat themselves as professors are.

Critical Listening

Critical listening entails listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information that can be inferred from context. A critical listener evaluates a message and accepts it, rejects it, or decides to withhold judgment and seek more information. As constant consumers of messages, we need to be able to assess the credibility of speakers and their messages and identify various persuasive appeals and faulty logic (known as fallacies), which you can learn more about in the chapter titled "Informative and Persuasive Speaking". Critical listening is important during persuasive exchanges, but I recommend always employing some degree of critical listening because you may find yourself in a persuasive interaction that you thought was informative. Critical-listening skills are useful when listening to a persuasive speech in this class and when processing any of the persuasive media messages we receive daily. You can see judges employ critical listening, with varying degrees of competence, on talent competition shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *America's Got Talent*, and *The Voice*. While the exchanges between judge and contestant on these shows are expected to be subjective and critical, critical listening is also important when listening to speakers who have stated or implied objectivity, such as parents, teachers, political leaders, doctors, and religious leaders. We will learn more about how to improve your critical thinking skills later in this chapter.

Empathetic Listening

Empathetic listening is the most challenging form of listening and occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling. Empathetic listening is distinct from sympathetic listening.



Figure 5.1.3: We support others through empathetic listening by trying to "feel with" them, as demonstrated here by this adult tenderly holding a child. (CC BY 2.0; Stewart Black via Flickr)

While the word *empathy* means to "feel into" or "feel with" another person, *sympathy* means to "feel for" someone. Sympathy is generally more self-oriented and distant than empathy (Bruneau, 1993). Empathetic listening is other-oriented and should be genuine. Because of our own centrality in our perceptual world, empathetic listening can be difficult. It's often much easier for us to tell our own story or to give advice than it is to really listen to and empathize with someone else. We should keep in mind that sometimes others just need to be heard and our feedback isn't actually desired.

Empathetic listening is key for dialogue and helps maintain interpersonal relationships. In order to reach dialogue, people must have a degree of open-mindedness and a commitment to civility that allows them to be empathetic while still allowing them to believe in and advocate for their own position. An excellent example of critical and empathetic listening in action is the international Truth and Reconciliation movement. The most well-known example of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) occurred in South Africa as a way to address the various conflicts that occurred during apartheid (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2012). The first TRC in the United States occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina, as a means of processing the events and aftermath of November 3, 1979, when members of the Ku Klux Klan shot and killed five members of the Communist Workers' Party during a daytime confrontation witnessed by news crews and many bystanders. The goal of such commissions is to allow people to tell their stories, share their perspectives in an open environment, and be listened to. The Greensboro TRC states its purpose as such:[1]

The truth and reconciliation process seeks to heal relations between opposing sides by uncovering all pertinent facts, distinguishing truth from lies, and allowing for acknowledgement, appropriate public mourning, forgiveness and healing...The focus often is on giving victims, witnesses, and even perpetrators a chance to publicly tell their stories without fear of prosecution.

Listening Styles

Just as there are different types of listening, there are also different styles of listening. People may be categorized as one or more of the following listeners: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented listeners. Research finds that 40 percent of people have more than one preferred listening style, and that they choose a style based on the listening situation (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). Other research finds that people often still revert to a single preferred style in times of emotional or cognitive stress, even if they know a different style of listening would be better (Worthington, 2003). Following a brief overview of each listening style, we will explore some of their applications, strengths, and weaknesses.

- **People-oriented listeners** are concerned about the needs and feelings of others and may get distracted from a specific task or the content of a message in order to address feelings.
- **Action-oriented listeners** prefer well-organized, precise, and accurate information. They can become frustrated if they perceive communication to be unorganized or inconsistent, or a speaker to be "long-winded."
- **Content-oriented listeners** are analytic and enjoy processing complex messages. They like in-depth information and like to learn about multiple sides of a topic or hear multiple perspectives on an issue. Their thoroughness can be difficult to manage

if there are time constraints.
- **Time-oriented listeners** are concerned with completing tasks and achieving goals. They do not like information perceived as irrelevant and like to stick to a timeline. They may cut people off and make quick decisions (taking shortcuts or cutting corners) when they think they have enough information.

People-Oriented Listeners

People-oriented listeners are concerned about the emotional states of others and listen with the purpose of offering support in interpersonal relationships. People-oriented listeners can be characterized as "supporters" who are caring and understanding. These listeners are sought out because they are known as people who will "lend an ear." They may or may not be valued for the advice they give, but all people often want is a good listener. This type of listening may be especially valuable in interpersonal communication involving emotional exchanges, as a person-oriented listener can create a space where people can make themselves vulnerable without fear of being cut off or judged. People-oriented listeners are likely skilled empathetic listeners and may find success in supportive fields like counseling, social work, or nursing. Interestingly, such fields are typically feminized, in that people often associate the characteristics of people-oriented listeners with roles filled by women. We will learn more about how gender and listening intersect in Section 5, "Listening and Gender".

Action-Oriented Listeners

Action-oriented listeners focus on what action needs to take place regarding a received message and try to formulate an organized way to initiate that action. These listeners are frustrated by disorganization because it detracts from the possibility of actually doing something. Action-oriented listeners can be thought of as "builders"—like an engineer, a construction site foreperson, or a skilled project manager. This style of listening can be very effective when a task needs to be completed under time, budgetary, or other logistical constraints. One research study found that people prefer an action-oriented style of listening in instructional contexts (Imhof, 2004). In other situations, such as interpersonal communication, action-oriented listeners may not actually be very interested in listening, instead taking a "What do you want me to do?" approach. A friend and colleague of mine who exhibits some qualities of an action-oriented listener once told me about an encounter she had with a close friend who had a stillborn baby. My friend said she immediately went into "action mode." Although it was difficult for her to connect with her friend at an emotional/empathetic level, she was able to use her action-oriented approach to help out in other ways as she helped make funeral arrangements, coordinated with other family and friends, and handled the details that accompanied this tragic emotional experience. As you can see from this example, the action-oriented listening style often contrasts with the people-oriented listening style.

Content-Oriented Listeners

Content-oriented listeners like to listen to complex information and evaluate the content of a message, often from multiple perspectives, before concluding. These listeners can be thought of as "learners," and they also ask questions to solicit more information to fill out their understanding of an issue. Content-oriented listeners often enjoy high perceived credibility because of their thorough, balanced, and objective approach to engaging with information. Content-oriented listeners are likely skilled informational and critical listeners and may find success in academic careers in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences. Ideally, judges and politicians would also possess these characteristics.

Time-Oriented Listeners

Time-oriented listeners are more concerned about time limits and timelines than they are with the content or senders of a message. These listeners can be thought of as "executives," and they tend to actually verbalize the time constraints under which they are operating.



Figure 5.1.3: Time-oriented listeners listen on a schedule, often giving people limits on their availability by saying, for example, "I only have about five minutes." This is especially true in non-face-to-face conversations. (CC BY-NC 2.0; JD Lasica via Flickr)

For example, a time-oriented supervisor may say the following to an employee who has just entered his office and asked to talk: "Sure, I can talk, but I only have about five minutes." These listeners may also exhibit nonverbal cues that indicate time and/or attention shortages, such as looking at a clock, avoiding eye contact, or nonverbally trying to close down an interaction. Time-oriented listeners are also more likely to interrupt others, which may make them seem insensitive to emotional/personal needs. People often get action-oriented and time-oriented listeners confused. Action-oriented listeners would be happy to get to a conclusion or decision quickly if they perceive that they are acting on well-organized and accurate information. They would, however, not mind taking longer to reach a conclusion when dealing with a complex topic, and they would delay deciding if the information presented to them didn't meet their standards of organization. Unlike time-oriented listeners, action-oriented listeners are not as likely to cut people off (especially if people are presenting relevant information) and are not as likely to take shortcuts.

Key Takeaways

- Listening is the process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages.
- Improving our listening skills can benefit us in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- Discriminative listening is the most basic form of listening, and we use it to distinguish between and focus on specific sounds.
- We use informational listening to try to comprehend and retain information. Through critical listening, we analyze and evaluate messages at various levels. We use empathetic listening to try to understand or experience what a speaker is feeling.
- People-oriented listeners are concerned with others' needs and feelings. Action-oriented listeners prefer listening to well-organized and precise information and are more concerned about solving an issue than they are about supporting the speaker. Content-oriented listeners enjoy processing complicated information and are typically viewed as credible because they view an issue from multiple perspectives before making a decision.

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5.2: Barriers to Effective Listening

Hurdles in the Listening Process

Barriers to effective listening are present at every stage of the listening process (Hargie, 2011). At the receiving stage, noise can block or distort incoming stimuli. At the interpreting stage, complex or abstract information may be difficult to relate to previous experiences, making it difficult to reach an understanding. At the recalling stage, natural limits to our memory and challenges to concentration can interfere with remembering. At the evaluating stage, personal biases and prejudices can lead us to block people out or assume we know what they are going to say. At the responding stage, a lack of paraphrasing and questioning skills can lead to misunderstanding. In the following section, we will explore how environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and bad listening practices present barriers to effective listening.

Environmental and Physical Barriers to Listening

Factors such as lighting, temperature, and furniture are **environmental barriers** that affect our ability to listen. A room that is too dark can make us sleepy, just as a room that is too warm or cool can raise awareness of our physical discomfort to a point that it is distracting. **Physical barriers,** such as seating arrangements where people are placed too far apart and separated, may prevent effective listening. In general, listening is easier when listeners can make direct eye contact with and are in close physical proximity to a speaker. In small group work, when group members are allowed to choose a leader, they often choose the person who is sitting at the center or head of the table (Andersen, 1999). Even though the person may not have demonstrated any leadership abilities, people subconsciously gravitate toward speakers who are nonverbally accessible. The ability to effectively see and hear a person increases people's confidence in their abilities to receive and process information. Eye contact and physical proximity can still be affected by noise. Indeed, environmental noises such as a whirring air conditioner, barking dogs, or a ringing fire alarm can noticeably interfere with listening despite direct lines of sight and well-placed furniture.

Physiological noise, like environmental noise, can interfere with our ability to process incoming information. This is considered a physical barrier to effective listening because it emanates from our physical body. Physiological noise is noise stemming from a physical illness, injury, or bodily stress. Ailments such as a cold, a broken leg, a headache, or a poison ivy outbreak can range from annoying to unbearably painful and impact our listening relative to their intensity. Another type of noise, psychological noise, bridges physical and cognitive barriers to effective listening. Psychological noise, or noise stemming from our psychological states, including moods and level of arousal, can facilitate or impede listening. Any mood or state of arousal, positive or negative, that is too far above or below our regular baseline creates a barrier to message reception and processing. The generally positive emotional state of being in love can be just as much of a barrier as feeling hatred. Excited arousal can also distract as much as anxious arousal. Stress about an upcoming event, ranging from losing a job to having surgery to wondering about what to eat for lunch, can overshadow incoming messages. While we will explore cognitive barriers to effective listening more in the next section, psychological noise is relevant here given that the body and mind are not completely separate. In fact, they can interact in ways that further interfere with listening. Fatigue, for example, is usually a combination of psychological and physiological stresses that manifests as stress (psychological noise) and weakness, sleepiness, and tiredness (physiological noise). Additionally, mental anxiety (psychological noise) can also manifest itself in our bodies through trembling, sweating, blushing, or even breaking out in rashes (physiological noise).

Cognitive and Personal Barriers to Listening

Aside from the barriers to effective listening that may be present in the environment or emanate from our bodies, **cognitive barriers** such as limits in cognitive function, a lack of listening preparation, and difficult or disorganized messages can prevent one from listening effectively. Additionally, **personal barriers**, such as prejudices and judgments about certain people, can also interfere with their listening. Whether you call it multitasking, daydreaming, glazing over, or drifting off, we all cognitively process other things while receiving messages. If you think of your listening mind as a wall of ten televisions, you may notice that in some situations, five of the ten televisions are tuned into one channel. If that one channel is a lecture being given by your professor, then you are exerting about half of your cognitive processing abilities on one message. In another situation, all ten televisions may be on different channels. The fact that we have the capability to process more than one thing at a time offers some advantages and disadvantages. But unless we can better understand how our cognitive capacities and personal preferences affect our listening, we are likely to experience more barriers than benefits.

Difference Between Speech and Thought Rate

Our ability to process more information than what comes from one speaker or source creates a barrier to effective listening. While people speak at a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute, we can process between 400 and 800 words per minute (Hargie, 2011). This gap between speech rate and thought rate allows us to side-process any number of thoughts that can be distracting from a more important message. Because of this gap, it is impossible to give one message our "undivided attention," but we can occupy other channels in our minds with thoughts related to the central message. For example, using some of your extra cognitive processing abilities to repeat, rephrase, or reorganize messages coming from one source allows you to use that extra capacity in a way that reinforces the primary message.

The difference between speech and thought rate connects to personal barriers to listening, as personal concerns are often the focus of competing thoughts that can take us away from listening and challenge our ability to concentrate on others' messages. Two common barriers to concentration are self-centeredness and lack of motivation (Brownell, 1993). For example, when our self-consciousness is raised, we may be too busy thinking about how we look, how we're sitting, or what others think of us to be attentive to an incoming message. Additionally, we are often challenged when presented with messages that we do not find personally relevant. In general, we employ selective attention, which refers to our tendency to pay attention to the messages that benefit us in some way and filter others out. So the student who is checking his or her Twitter feed during class may suddenly switch his or her attention back to the previously ignored professor when the following words are spoken: "This will be important for the exam."



Figure 5.2.1 Drifting attention is a common barrier to listening. Try to find personal relevance in the message to help maintain concentration. (CC BY-SA 3.0;Marko KZM via Wikimedia Commons)

Another common barrier to effective listening that stems from the speech and thought rate divide is response preparation**.** **Response preparation** refers to our tendency to rehearse what we are going to say next while a speaker is still talking. Rehearsal of what we will say once a speaker's turn is over is an important part of the listening process that takes place between the recalling and evaluation and/or the evaluation and responding stage. Rehearsal becomes problematic when response preparation begins as someone is receiving a message and hasn't had time to engage in interpretation or recall. In this sense, we are listening to respond instead of with the goal of understanding, which can lead us to miss important information that could influence our response.

Think About This 5.2.1 How Do We Plug In?

Technology, Multitasking, and Listening

Do you like to listen to music while you do homework? Do you clean your apartment while talking to your mom on the phone? Do you think students should be allowed to use laptops in all college classrooms? Your answers to these questions will point to your preferences for multitasking. If you answered "yes" to most of them, then you are in line with the general practices of the "net generation" of digital natives for whom multitasking, especially with various forms of media, is a way of life. Multitasking is a concept that has been around for a while and emerged along with the increasing expectation that we will fill multiple role demands throughout the day. Multitasking can be pretty straightforward and beneficial—for example, if we listen to motivating music while working out. But multitasking can be very inefficient, especially when one or more of our concurrent tasks are complex or unfamiliar to us (Bardhi, Rohm, & Sultan, 2010).

Media multitasking specifically refers to the use of multiple forms of media at the same time, and it can have positive and negative effects on listening (Bardhi, Rohm, & Sultan, 2010). The negative effects of media multitasking have received much attention in recent years, as people question the decreasing attention span within our society. Media multitasking may promote inefficiency because it can lead to distractions and plays a prominent role in procrastination for many. The numerous options for media engagement that we have can also lead to a feeling of chaos as our attention is pulled in multiple directions, creating a general sense of disorder. And many of us feel a sense of enslavement when we engage in media multitasking, as we feel like we can't live without certain personal media outlets.

Media multitasking can also give people a sense of control, as they use multiple technologies to access various points of information to solve a problem or complete a task. An employee may be able to use her iPad to look up information needed to address a concern raised during a business meeting. She could then e-mail that link to the presenter, who could share it with the room through his laptop and an LCD projector. Media multitasking can also increase efficiency, as people can carry out tasks faster. The links to videos and online articles that I've included in this textbook allow readers like you to quickly access additional information about a particular subject to prepare for a presentation or complete a paper assignment. Media multitasking can also increase engagement. Aside from just reading material in a textbook, students can now access information through an author's blog or Twitter account.

Media multitasking can produce an experience that feels productive, but is it really? What are the consequences of our media- and technology-saturated world? Although many of us like to think that we're good multitaskers, some research indicates otherwise. For example, student laptop use during class has been connected to lower academic performance (Fried, 2008). This is because media multitasking has the potential to interfere with listening at multiple stages of the process. The study showed that laptop use interfered with receiving, as students using them reported that they paid less attention to the class lectures. This is because students used the laptops for purposes other than taking notes or exploring class content. Of the students using laptops, 81 percent checked e-mail during lectures, 68 percent used instant messaging, and 43 percent surfed the web. Students using laptops also had difficulty with the interpretation stage of listening, as they found less clarity in the parts of the lecture they heard and did not understand the course material as much as students who didn't use a laptop. The difficulties with receiving and interpreting obviously create issues with recall that can lead to lower academic performance in the class. Laptop use also negatively affected the listening abilities of students not use laptops. These students reported that they were distracted, as their attention was drawn to the laptop screens of other students.

1. What are some common ways that you engage in media multitasking? What are some positive and negative consequences of your media multitasking?
2. What strategies do you or could you use to help minimize the negative effects of media multitasking?
3. Should laptops, smartphones, and other media devices be used by students during college classes? Why or why not? What restrictions or guidelines for use could instructors provide that would capitalize on the presence of such media to enhance student learning and help minimize distractions?

Lack of Listening Preparation

Another barrier to effective listening is a general lack of listening preparation. Unfortunately, most people have never received any formal training or instruction related to listening. Although some people think listening skills just develop over time, competent listening is difficult, and enhancing listening skills takes concerted effort. Even when listening education is available, people do not embrace it as readily as they do opportunities to enhance their speaking skills. Listening is often viewed as an annoyance or a chore, or just ignored or minimized as part of the communication process. In addition, in many individualistic societies, a higher value is placed on speaking more than on listening. It is the speakers who are sometimes literally in the spotlight. Although listening competence is a crucial part of social interaction and many of us value others we perceive to be "good listeners," listening just doesn't get the same kind of praise, attention, instruction, or credibility as speaking. Teachers, parents, and relational partners explicitly convey the importance of listening through statements like "You better listen to me," "Listen closely," and

"Listen up," but these demands are rarely paired with concrete instruction.

Bad Messages and/or Speakers

Bad messages and/or speakers also present a barrier to effective listening. Sometimes our trouble listening originates in the sender. In terms of message construction, poorly structured messages or messages that are too vague, too jargon-filled, or too simple can present listening difficulties. In terms of speakers' delivery, verbal fillers, monotone voices, distracting movements, or a disheveled appearance can inhibit our ability to cognitively process a message (Hargie, 2011). Speakers can employ particular strategies to create listenable messages that take some of the burden off the listener by tailoring a message to be heard and processed easily. There are many strategies for creating messages tailored for oral delivery, including things like preview and review statements, transitions, and parallel wording. Listening also becomes difficult when a speaker tries to present too much information. Information overload is a common barrier to effective listening that good speakers can help mitigate by building redundancy into their speeches and providing concrete examples of new information to help audience members interpret and understand the key ideas.

Prejudice

Oscar Wilde said, "Listening is a very dangerous thing. If one listens, one may be convinced." Unfortunately, some of our default ways of processing information and perceiving others lead us to rigid ways of thinking. When we engage in prejudiced listening, we are usually trying to preserve our ways of thinking and avoid being convinced of something different. This type of prejudice is a barrier to effective listening because when we prejudge a person based on his or her identity or ideas, we usually stop listening in an active and/or ethical way.

We exhibit prejudice in our listening in several ways, some of which are more obvious than others. For example, we may claim to be in a hurry and only selectively address the parts of a message that we agree with or that aren't controversial. We can also operate from a state of denial where we avoid a subject or person altogether so that our views are not challenged. Prejudices that are based on a person's identity, such as race, age, occupation, or appearance, may lead us to assume that we know what he or she will say, essentially closing down the listening process. Keeping an open mind and engaging in perception checking can help us identify prejudiced listening and hopefully shift into more competent listening practices.

Bad Listening Practices

The previously discussed barriers to effective listening may be difficult to overcome because they are at least partially beyond our control. Physical barriers, cognitive limitations, and perceptual biases exist within all of us, and it is more realistic to believe that we can become more conscious of and lessen them than it is to believe that we can eliminate them. Other "bad listening" practices may be habitual, but they are easier to address with some concerted effort. These bad listening practices include interrupting, distorted listening, eavesdropping, aggressive listening, narcissistic listening, and pseudo-listening.

Interrupting

Conversations unfold as a series of turns, and turn-taking is negotiated through a complex set of verbal and nonverbal signals that are consciously and subconsciously received. In this sense, conversational turn-taking has been likened to a dance where communicators try to avoid stepping on each other's toes. One of the most frequent glitches in the turn-taking process is interruption, but not all interruptions are considered "bad listening." An interruption could be unintentional if we misread cues and think a person is done speaking, only to have him or her start up again at the same time we do. Sometimes interruptions are more like overlapping statements that show support (e.g., "I think so too.") or excitement about the conversation (e.g., "That's so cool!"). Back-channel cues like "uh-huh," as we learned earlier, also overlap with a speaker's message. We may also interrupt out of necessity if we're engaged in a task with the other person and need to offer directions (e.g., "Turn left here."), instructions (e.g., "Will you whisk the eggs?"), or warnings (e.g., "Look out behind you!"). All these interruptions are not typically thought of as evidence of bad listening unless they become distracting for the speaker or are unnecessary.

Unintentional interruptions can still be considered bad listening if they result from mindless communication. As we've already learned, intended meaning is not as important as the meaning that is generated in the interaction itself. So if you interrupt unintentionally, but because you were only half-listening, then the interruption is still evidence of bad listening. The speaker may form a negative impression of you that can't just be erased by you noting that you didn't "mean to interrupt." Interruptions can also be used as an attempt to dominate a conversation. A person engaging in this type of interruption may lead the other

communicator to try to assert dominance, too, resulting in a competition to see who can hold the floor the longest or the most often. More than likely, though, the speaker will form a negative impression of the interrupter and may withdraw from the conversation.

Distorted Listening

Distorted listening occurs in many ways. Sometimes we just get the order of information wrong, which can have relatively little negative effects if we are casually recounting a story, annoying effects if we forget the order of turns (left, right, left or right, left, right?) in our driving directions, or very negative effects if we recount the events of a crime out of order, which leads to faulty testimony at a criminal trial. Rationalization is another form of distorted listening through which we adapt, edit, or skew incoming information to fit our existing schemata. We may, for example, reattribute the cause of something to better suit our own beliefs. If a professor is explaining to a student why he earned a "D" on his final paper, the student could reattribute the cause from "I didn't follow the paper guidelines" to "this professor is an unfair grader." Sometimes we actually change the words we hear to make them better fit what we are thinking. This can easily happen if we join a conversation late, overhear part of a conversation, or are being a lazy listener and miss important setup and context. Passing along distorted information can lead to negative consequences ranging from starting a false rumor about someone to passing along incorrect medical instructions from one health-care provider to the next (Hargie, 2011). Last, the addition of material to a message is a type of distorted listening that actually goes against our normal pattern of listening, which involves reducing the amount of information and losing some meaning as we take it in. The metaphor of "weaving a tall tale" is related to the practice of distorting through addition, as inaccurate or fabricated information is added to what was actually heard. Addition of material is also a common feature of gossip. An excellent example of the result of distorted listening is provided by the former character Anthony Crispino on *Saturday Night Live,* who, in one instance, passes along distorted news on the "Weekend Update" segment. In some older episodes, he noted that LeBron James turned down The *Cleveland Show* to be on *Miami Vice* (instead of having left the Cleveland Cavaliers to play basketball for the Miami Heat) and that President Obama planned on repealing the "Bush haircuts" (instead of the Bush tax cuts).

Eavesdropping

Eavesdropping is considered a negative listening practice that involves a calculated and planned attempt to secretly listen to a conversation. There is a difference between eavesdropping on and overhearing a conversation. Many, if not most, of the interactions we have throughout the day occur in the presence of other people. However, given that our perceptual fields are usually focused on the interaction, we are often unaware of the other people around us or don't think about the fact that they could be listening in on our conversation. We usually only become aware of the fact that other people could be listening in when we're discussing something private.



Figure 5.2.2: Eavesdropping entails intentionally listening in on a conversation that you are not a part of. (CC BY-SA 2.0; JoanDragonfly via Wikimedia Commons)

People eavesdrop for a variety of reasons. People might think another person is talking about them behind their back or

that someone is engaged in illegal or unethical behavior. Sometimes people eavesdrop to feed the gossip mill or out of curiosity (McCornack, 2007). In any case, this type of listening is considered bad because it is a violation of people's privacy. Consequences for eavesdropping may include an angry reaction if caught, damage to interpersonal relationships, or being perceived as dishonest and sneaky. Additionally, eavesdropping may lead people to find out information that is personally upsetting or hurtful, especially if the point of the eavesdropping is to find out what people are saying behind their backs.

Aggressive Listening

Aggressive listening is a negative listening practice in which people pay attention with the intention of attacking the speaker for something they said (McCornack, 2007). Aggressive listeners like to ambush speakers to critique their ideas, personality, or other characteristics. Such behavior often results from built-up frustration within an interpersonal relationship. Unfortunately, the more two people know each other, the better they will be at aggressive listening. Consider the exchange in Example 5.2.1, between long-term partners Summer and Deb:

Example 5.2.1 On the Attack

Scenario: Deb and Summer are cleaning up after dinner when the following conversation takes place:

Deb: I've been thinking about making a salsa garden next to the side porch. I think it would be really good to be able to go pick our own tomatoes, peppers,s and cilantro to make homemade salsa.

Summer: Really? When are you thinking about doing it?

Deb: Next weekend. Would you like to help?

Summer: I won't hold my breath. Every time you come up with some "idea of the week," you get so excited about it. But do you ever follow through with it? No. We'll be eating salsa from the store next year, just like we are now.

Impact: Deb is speaking innocently to Summer, who is listening, but with the intention of attaching Deb. Summer's response is rooted in frustration that has been building up over time.

Although Summer's initial response to Deb's idea is seemingly appropriate and positive, she asks the question because she has already planned her upcoming aggressive response. Summer's aggression toward Deb isn't about a salsa garden; it's about building frustration with what Summer perceives as Deb's lack of follow-through on her ideas. Aside from engaging in aggressive listening because of built-up frustration, such listeners may also attack others' ideas or mock their feelings because of their own low self-esteem and insecurities.

Narcissistic Listening

Narcissistic listening is a form of self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them (McCornack, 2007). Narcissistic listeners redirect the focus of the conversation to themselves by interrupting or changing the topic. When the focus is taken off them, narcissistic listeners may give negative feedback by pouting, providing negative criticism of the speaker or topic, or ignoring the speaker. A common sign of narcissistic listening is the combination of a "pivot," when listeners shift the focus of attention back to them, and "one-upping," when listeners try to top what previous speakers have said during the interaction. You can see this narcissistic combination in the following interaction:

Bryce:
My boss has been really unfair to me lately and hasn't been letting me work around my class schedule. I think I may have to quit, but I don't know where I'll find another job.

Toby:
Why are you complaining? I've been working with the same stupid boss for two years. He doesn't even care that I'm trying to get my degree and work at the same time. And you should hear the way he talks to me in front of the other employees.

Narcissistic listeners, given their self-centeredness, may actually fool themselves into thinking that they are listening and actively contributing to a conversation. We all have the urge to share our own stories during interactions because other people's

communication triggers our own memories about related experiences. It is generally more competent to withhold sharing our stories until the other person has been able to speak and we have given the appropriate support and response. But we all shift the focus of a conversation back to us occasionally, either because we don't know another way to respond or because we are making an attempt at empathy. Narcissistic listeners consistently interrupt or follow another speaker with statements like "That reminds me of the time...," "Well, if I were you...," and "That's nothing..." (Nichols, 1995) As we'll learn later, matching stories isn't considered empathetic listening, but occasionally doing it doesn't make you a narcissistic listener.

Pseudo-Listening

Do you have a friend or family member who repeats stories? If so, then you've probably engaged in pseudo-listening as a politeness strategy. **Pseudo-listening** is behaving as if you're paying attention to a speaker when you're actually not (McCornack, 2007). Outwardly visible signals of attentiveness are an important part of the listening process, but when they are just an "act," the pseudo-listener is engaging in bad listening behaviors. She or he is not actually going through the stages of the listening process and will likely not be able to recall the speaker's message or offer a competent and relevant response. Although it is a bad listening practice, we all understandably engage in pseudo-listening from time to time. If a friend needs someone to talk but you're really tired or experiencing some other barrier to effective listening, it may be worth engaging in pseudo-listening as a relational maintenance strategy, especially if the friend just needs a sounding board and isn't expecting advice or guidance. We may also pseudo-listen to a romantic partner's or grandfather's story for the fifteenth time to prevent hurting their feelings. We should avoid pseudo-listening when possible and should definitely avoid making it a listening habit. Although we may get away with it in some situations, each time we risk being "found out," which could have negative relational consequences.

Key Takeaways

- Environmental and physical barriers to effective listening include furniture placement, environmental noise such as sounds of traffic or people talking, physiological noise such as a sinus headache or hunger, and psychological noise such as stress or anger.
- Cognitive barriers to effective listening include the difference between speech and thought rate that allows us "extra room" to think about other things while someone is talking and limitations in our ability or willingness to concentrate or pay attention. Personal barriers to effective listening include a lack of listening preparation, poorly structured and/or poorly delivered messages, and prejudice.
- Eavesdropping is a planned attempt to secretly listen to a conversation, which is a violation of the speakers' privacy.
- Narcissistic listening is self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them by interrupting, changing the subject, or drawing attention away from others.
- Pseudo-listening is "fake listening" in that people behave like they are paying attention and listening when they actually are not.

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5.3: Improving Listening Competence

Becoming a Better Listener

Many people admit that they could stand to improve their listening skills. This section will help us do that. In this section, we will learn strategies for developing and improving competence at each stage of the listening process. We will also define active listening and the behaviors that go along with it. Looking back to the types of listening discussed earlier, we will learn specific strategies for sharpening our critical and empathetic listening skills. In keeping with our focus on integrative learning, we will also apply the skills we have learned in academic, professional, and relational contexts and explore how culture and gender affect listening.

Listening Competence at Each Stage of the Listening Process

We can develop competence within each stage of the listening process, as the following list indicates (Ridge, 1993):

1. To improve listening at the receiving stage,
    - prepare yourself to listen,
    - discern between intentional messages and noise,
    - concentrate on stimuli most relevant to your listening purpose(s) or goal(s),
    - be mindful of the selection and attention process as much as possible,
    - pay attention to turn-taking signals so you can follow the conversational flow, and
    - avoid interrupting someone while they are speaking in order to maintain your ability to receive stimuli and listen.
2. To improve listening at the interpreting stage,
    - identify main points and supporting points;
    - use contextual clues from the person or environment to discern additional meaning;
    - be aware of how a relational, cultural, or situational context can influence meaning;
    - be aware of the different meanings of silence; and
    - note differences in tone of voice and other paralinguistic cues that influence meaning.
3. To improve listening at the recalling stage,
    - use multiple sensory channels to decode messages and make more complete memories;
    - repeat, rephrase, and reorganize information to fit your cognitive preferences; and
    - use mnemonic devices as a gimmick to help with recall.
4. To improve listening at the evaluating stage,
    - separate facts, inferences, and judgments;
    - be familiar with and able to identify persuasive strategies and fallacies of reasoning;
    - assess the credibility of the speaker and the message; and
    - be aware of your own biases and how your perceptual filters can create barriers to effective listening.
5. To improve listening at the responding stage,
    - ask appropriate clarifying and follow-up questions and paraphrase information to check understanding,
    - give feedback that is relevant to the speaker's purpose/motivation for speaking,
    - adapt your response to the speaker and the context, and
    - do not let the preparation and rehearsal of your response diminish earlier stages of listening.

Active Listening

Active listening refers to the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices. Active listening can help address many of the environmental, physical, cognitive, and personal barriers to effective listening that we discussed earlier. The behaviors associated with active listening can also enhance informational, critical, and empathetic listening.

Active Listening Can Help Overcome Barriers to Effective Listening

Being an active listener starts before you actually start receiving a message. Active listeners make strategic choices and take action in order to set up ideal listening conditions. Physical and environmental noises can often be managed by moving locations or by manipulating the lighting, temperature, or furniture. When possible, avoid important listening activities during times of distracting psychological or physiological noise. For example, we often know when we're going to be hungry, full, more awake, less awake, more anxious, or less anxious, and advance planning can alleviate the presence of these barriers. For college students, who often have some flexibility in their class schedules, knowing when you best listen can help you make strategic choices regarding what class to take when. And student options are increasing, as some colleges are offering classes in the overnight hours to accommodate working students and students who are just "night owls" (Toppo, 2011). Of course, we don't always have control over our schedule, in which case we will need to utilize other effective listening strategies that we will learn more about later in this chapter.

In terms of cognitive barriers to effective listening, we can prime ourselves to listen by analyzing a listening situation before it begins. For example, you could ask yourself the following questions:

1. "What are my goals for listening to this message?"
2. "How does this message relate to me / affect my life?"
3. "What listening type and style are most appropriate for this message?"

As we learned earlier, the difference between speech and thought processing rate means listeners' level of attention varies while receiving a message. Effective listeners must work to maintain focus as much as possible and refocus when attention shifts or fades (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). One way to do this is to find the motivation to listen. If you can identify intrinsic and or extrinsic motivations for listening to a particular message, then you will be more likely to remember the information presented. Ask yourself how a message could impact your life, your career, your intellect, or your relationships. This can help overcome our tendency toward selective attention. As senders of messages, we can help listeners by making the relevance of what we're saying clear and offering well-organized messages that are tailored for our listeners. We will learn much more about establishing relevance, organizing a message, and gaining the attention of an audience in public speaking contexts later in the book.

Given that we can process more words per minute than people can speak, we can engage in internal dialogue, making good use of our intrapersonal communication, to become a better listener. Three possibilities for internal dialogue include covert coaching, self-reinforcement, and covert questioning; explanations and examples of each follow (Hargie, 2011):

- **Covert coaching** involves sending yourself messages containing advice about better listening, such as "You're getting distracted by things you have to do after work. Just focus on what your supervisor is saying now."
- **Self-reinforcement** involves sending yourself affirmative and positive messages: "You're being a good active listener. This will help you do well on the next exam."
- **Covert questioning** involves asking yourself questions about the content in ways that focus your attention and reinforce the material: "What is the main idea from that PowerPoint slide?" "Why is he talking about his brother in front of our neighbors?"

Internal dialogue is a more structured way to engage in active listening, but we can use more general approaches as well. I suggest that students occupy the "extra" channels in their mind with thoughts that are related to the primary message being received instead of thoughts that are unrelated. We can use those channels to resort, rephrase, and repeat what a speaker says. When we resort, we can help mentally repair disorganized messages. When we rephrase, we can put messages into our own words in ways that better fit our cognitive preferences. When we repeat, we can help messages transfer from short-term to long-term memory.

Other tools can help with concentration and memory. **Mental bracketing** refers to the process of intentionally separating out intrusive or irrelevant thoughts that may distract you from listening (McCornack, 2007). This requires that we monitor our concentration and attention and be prepared to let thoughts that aren't related to a speaker's message pass through our minds without us giving them much attention. Mnemonic devices are techniques that can aid in information recall (Hargie 2011). Starting in ancient Greece and Rome, educators used these devices to help people remember information. They work by imposing order and organization on information. Three main mnemonic devices are acronyms, rhymes, and visualization, and examples of each follow:

- **Acronyms**: A memory technique that uses the first letters of a list of words to create a memorable word or phrase (e.g., HOMES for the Great Lakes: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- **Rhyme**: A memory aid that uses a catchy, rhyming phrase to make information easier to remember (e.g., "Righty tighty, lefty

loosey").
- **Visualization**: A memory technique that creates a mental image to help connect and recall information (e.g., imagining red port wine to remember the red navigation light is on the port side of a boat).

Active Listening Behaviors

From the suggestions discussed previously, you can see that we can prepare for active listening in advance and engage in certain cognitive strategies to help us listen better. We also engage in active listening behaviors as we receive and process messages.

Eye contact is a key sign of active listening. Speakers usually interpret a listener's eye contact as a signal of attentiveness. While a lack of eye contact may indicate inattentiveness, it can also signal cognitive processing. When we look away to process new information, we usually do it unconsciously. Be aware, however, that your conversational partner may interpret this as not listening. If you really do need to take a moment to think about something, you could indicate that to the other person by saying, "That's new information to me. Give me just a second to think through it." We already learned the role that back-channel cues play in listening. An occasional head nod and "uh-huh" signal that you are paying attention. However, when we give these cues as a form of "autopilot" listening, others can usually tell that we are pseudo-listening, and whether they call us on it or not, that impression could lead to negative judgments.

A more direct way to indicate active listening is to reference previous statements made by the speaker. Norms of politeness usually call on us to reference a past statement or connect to the speaker's current thought before starting a conversational turn. Being able to summarize what someone said to ensure that the topic has been satisfactorily covered and understood or being able to segue in such a way that validates what the previous speaker said helps regulate conversational flow. Asking probing questions is another way to directly indicate listening and to keep a conversation going, since they encourage and invite a person to speak more. You can also ask questions that seek clarification and not just elaboration. Speakers should present complex information at a slower speaking rate than familiar information, but many will not. Remember that your nonverbal feedback can be useful for a speaker, as it signals that you are listening but also whether or not you understand. If a speaker fails to read your nonverbal feedback, you may need to follow up with verbal communication in the form of paraphrased messages and clarifying questions.

As active listeners, we want to be excited and engaged, but don't let excitement manifest itself in interruptions. Being an active listener means knowing when to maintain our role as listener and resist the urge to take a conversational turn. Research shows that people with higher social status are more likely to interrupt others, so keep this in mind and be prepared for it if you are speaking to a high-status person, or try to resist it if you are the high-status person in an interaction (Hargie, 2011).



Figure 5.3.1: Good note-taking skills allow listeners to stay engaged with a message and aid in recall of information. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Steven Lilley via Flickr)

Note-taking can also indicate active listening. Translating information through writing into our own cognitive structures and schemata allows us to better interpret and assimilate information. Of course, note-taking isn't always a viable option. It would

be fairly awkward to take notes during a first date or a casual exchange between new coworkers. But in some situations where we wouldn't normally consider taking notes, a little awkwardness might be worth it for the sake of understanding and recalling the information. For example, many people don't think about taking notes when getting information from their doctor or banker. Students are encouraged to take notes during informal meetings because they may not realize it is appropriate or beneficial. Many people prefer that someone jot down notes rather than ask follow-up questions about information that has already been clearly communicated. To help facilitate your note-taking, you might say something like "Do you mind if I jot down some notes? This seems important."

In summary, active listening is exhibited through verbal and nonverbal cues, including steady eye contact with the speaker; smiling; slightly raised eyebrows; upright posture; body position that is leaned in toward the speaker; nonverbal back-channel cues such as head nods; verbal back-channel cues such as "OK," "mmhum," or "oh"; and a lack of distracting mannerisms like doodling or fidgeting (Hargie, 2011).

Becoming a Better Critical Listener

Critical listening involves evaluating the credibility, completeness, and worth of a speaker's message. Some listening scholars note that critical listening represents the deepest level of listening (Floyd, 1985). Critical listening is also important in a democracy that values free speech. The US Constitution grants US citizens the right to free speech, and many people duly protect that right for you and me. Since people can say just about anything they want, we are surrounded by countless messages that vary tremendously in terms of their value, degree of ethics, accuracy, and quality. Therefore it falls on us to responsibly and critically evaluate the messages we receive. Some messages are produced by people who are intentionally misleading, ill informed, or motivated by the potential for personal gain, but such messages can be received as honest, credible, or altruistic even though they aren't. Being able to critically evaluate messages helps us have more control over and awareness of the influence such people may have on us. In order to critically evaluate messages, we must enhance our critical-listening skills.

Some critical-listening skills include distinguishing between facts and inferences, evaluating supporting evidence, discovering your own biases, and listening beyond the message. Being an ethical communicator is being accountable for what we say by distinguishing between facts and inferences (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). This is an ideal that is not always met in practice, so a critical listener should also make these distinctions, since the speaker may not. Since facts are widely agreed-on conclusions, they can be verified as such through some extra research. Take care in your research to note the context from which the fact emerged, as speakers may take a statistic or quote out of context, distorting its meaning. Inferences are not as easy to evaluate, because they are based on unverifiable thoughts of a speaker or on speculation. **Inferences** are usually based at least partially on something that is known, so it is possible to evaluate whether an inference was made carefully or not. In this sense, you may evaluate an inference based on several known facts as more credible than an inference based on one fact and more speculation. Asking a question like "What led you to think this?" is a good way to get information needed to evaluate the strength of an inference.

Distinguishing among facts and inferences and evaluating the credibility of supporting material are critical-listening skills that also require good informational-listening skills. In more formal speaking situations, speakers may cite published or publicly available sources to support their messages. When speakers verbally cite their sources, you can use the credibility of the source to help evaluate the credibility of the speaker's message. For example, a national newspaper would likely be more credible on a major national event than a tabloid magazine or an anonymous blog. In regular interactions, people also have sources for their information but are not as likely to note them within their message. Asking questions like "Where'd you hear that?" or "How do you know that?" can help get information needed to make critical evaluations.

Discovering your own biases can help you recognize when they interfere with your ability to fully process a message. Unfortunately, most people aren't asked to critically reflect on their identities and their perspectives unless they are in college, and even people who were once critically reflective in college or elsewhere may no longer be so. Biases are also difficult to discover, because we don't see them as biases; we see them as normal or "the way things are." Asking yourself "What led you to think this?" and "How do you know that?" can be a good start toward acknowledging your biases.

Last, to be a better critical listener, think beyond the message. A good critical listener asks the following questions: What is being said and what is not being said? In whose interests are these claims being made? Whose voices/ideas are included and excluded? These questions take into account that speakers intentionally and unintentionally slant, edit, or twist messages to make them fit particular perspectives or for personal gain. Also ask yourself questions like "What are the speaker's goals?" You can also rephrase that question and direct it toward the speaker, asking them, "What is your goal in this interaction?" When you feel yourself nearing an evaluation or conclusion, pause and ask yourself what influenced you. Although we like to think that we are most often persuaded through logical evidence and reasoning, we are susceptible to persuasive shortcuts that rely on the

credibility or likability of a speaker or on our emotions rather than the strength of his or her evidence (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). So keep a check on your emotional involvement to be aware of how it may be influencing your evaluation. Also, be aware that how likable, attractive, or friendly you think a person is may also lead you to more positively evaluate his or her messages.

Tips to Help You Become a Better Critical Listener

- Ask questions to help get more information and increase your critical awareness when you get answers like "Because that's the way things are," "It's always been like that," "I don't know; I just don't like it," "Everyone believes that," or "It's just natural/normal." These are not really answers that are useful in your critical evaluation and may be an indication that speakers don't really know why they reached the conclusion they did or that they reached it without much critical thinking on their part.
- Be especially critical of speakers who set up "either/or" options, because they artificially limit an issue or situation to two options when there are always more. Also be aware of people who overgeneralize, especially when those generalizations are based on stereotypical or prejudiced views. For example, the world is not just Republican or Democrat, male or female, pro-life or pro-choice, or Christian or atheist.
- Evaluate the speaker's message instead of his or her appearance, personality, or other characteristics. Unless someone's appearance, personality, or behavior is relevant to an interaction, direct your criticism to the message.
- Be aware that critical evaluation isn't always quick or easy. Sometimes you may have to withhold judgment because your evaluation will take more time. Also keep in mind your evaluation may not be final, and you should be open to critical reflection and possible revision later.
- Avoid mind reading, which is assuming you know what the other person is going to say or that you know why they reached the conclusion they did. This leads to jumping to conclusions, which shortcuts the critical evaluation process.

Becoming a Better Empathetic Listener

A prominent scholar of **empathetic listening** describes it this way: "Empathetic listening is to be respectful of the dignity of others. Empathetic listening is a caring, a love of the wisdom to be found in others whoever they may be" (Bruneau, 1993). This quote conveys that empathetic listening is more philosophical than the other types of listening. It requires that we are open to subjectivity and that we engage in it because we genuinely see it as worthwhile.

Combining active and empathetic listening leads to active-empathetic listening. During **active-empathetic listening** a listener becomes actively and emotionally involved in an interaction in such a way that it is conscious on the part of the listener and perceived by the speaker (Bodie, 2011). To be a better empathetic listener, we need to suspend or at least attempt to suppress our judgment of the other person or their message so we can fully attend to both. Paraphrasing is an important part of empathetic listening, because it helps us put the other person's words into our frame of experience without making it about us. In addition, speaking the words of someone else in our own way can help evoke within us the feelings that the other person felt while saying them (Bodie, 2011). Active-empathetic listening is more than echoing back verbal messages. We can also engage in **mirroring**, which refers to a listener's replication of the nonverbal signals of a speaker (Bruneau, 1993). Therapists, for example, are often taught to adopt a posture and tone similar to their patients in order to build rapport and project empathy.

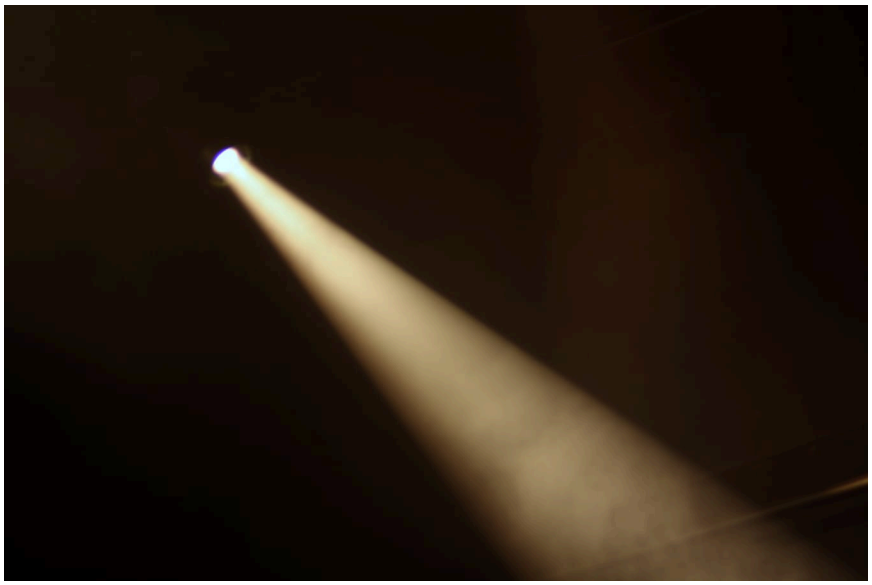


Figure 5.3.2: A bright singular spotlight shining through a dark room. Empathetic listeners should not steal the spotlight from the speaker. Offer support without offering your own story or advice. (CC BY 2.0; Blondinrikard Frö via Flickr)

Paraphrasing and questioning are useful techniques for empathetic listening because they allow us to respond to a speaker without taking "the floor," or the attention, away for long. Specifically, questions that ask for elaboration act as "verbal door openers," and inviting someone to speak more and then validating their speech through active listening cues can help a person feel "listened to" (Hargie, 2011). Paraphrasing and asking questions are also useful when there is a temptation to share personal stories and experiences instead of maintaining the role of listener. These questions are not intended to solicit additional information in order to guide or direct the speaker toward a specific course of action. Although it is easy to slip into an advisory mode by saying things like, "Well, if I were you, I would...," the temptation to give unsolicited advice should be resisted.

Empathetic listening can be worthwhile, but it also brings challenges. In terms of costs, empathetic listening can use up time and effort. Since this type of listening can't be contained within a proscribed time frame, it may be especially difficult for time-oriented listeners (Bruneau, 1993). Empathetic listening can also be a test of our endurance, as its orientation toward and focus on supporting the other requires the processing and integration of much verbal and nonverbal information. Due to this potential strain, it's important to know your limits as an empathetic listener. While listening can be therapeutic, it is not appropriate for people without training and preparation to try to serve as a therapist. Some people have chronic issues that necessitate professional listening for the purposes of evaluation, diagnosis, and therapy. Lending an ear is different from diagnosing and treating. If you have a friend who is exhibiting signs of a more serious issue that needs attention, listen to the extent that you feel comfortable and then be prepared to provide referrals to other resources that have training to help. To face these challenges, good empathetic listeners typically have a generally positive self-concept and self-esteem, are nonverbally sensitive and expressive, and are comfortable with embracing another person's subjectivity and refraining from too much analytic thought.

Becoming a Better Contextual Listener

Active, critical, and empathetic listening skills can be helpful in a variety of contexts. Understanding the role that listening plays in professional, relational, cultural, and gendered contexts can help us more competently apply these skills. Whether we are listening to or evaluating messages from a supervisor, parent, or intercultural conversational partner, we have much to gain or lose based on our ability to apply listening skills and knowledge in various contexts.

Listening in Professional Contexts

Listening and organizational-communication scholars note that listening is one of the most neglected aspects of organizational-communication research (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008). Aside from a lack of research, a study also found that business schools lack curriculum that includes instruction and/or training in communication skills like listening in their master of business administration (MBA) programs (Alsop, 2002). This lack of a focus on listening persists, even though we know that more effective listening skills have been shown to enhance sales performance and that managers who exhibit good listening skills help create open communication climates that can lead to increased feelings of supportiveness, motivation, and productivity (Flynn, Valikoski,

& Grau, 2008). Specifically, empathetic listening and active listening can play key roles in organizational communication. Managers are wise to enhance their empathetic listening skills, as being able to empathize with employees contributes to a positive communication climate. Active listening among organizational members also promotes involvement and increases motivation, which leads to more cohesion and enhances the communication climate.

Organizational scholars have examined various communication climates specific to listening. **Listening environment** refers to characteristics and norms of an organization and its members that contribute to expectations for and perceptions about listening (Brownell, 1993). Positive listening environments are perceived to be more employee centered, which can improve job satisfaction and cohesion. But how do we create such environments?

Positive listening environments are facilitated by the breaking down of barriers to concentration, the reduction of noise, the creation of a shared reality (through shared language, such as similar jargon or a shared vision statement), intentional spaces that promote listening, official opportunities that promote listening, training in listening for all employees, and leaders who model good listening practices and praise others who are successful listeners (Brownell, 1993). Policies and practices that support listening must go hand in hand. After all, what does an “open-door” policy mean if it is not coupled with actions that demonstrate the sincerity of the policy?

Listening in Relational Contexts

Listening plays a central role in establishing and maintaining our relationships (Nelson-Jones, 2006). Without some listening competence, we wouldn’t be able to engage in the self-disclosure process, which is essential for the establishment of relationships. Newly acquainted people get to know each other through increasingly personal and reciprocal disclosures of personal information. In order to reciprocate a conversational partner’s disclosure, we must process it through listening. Once relationships are formed, listening to others provides a psychological reward, through the simple act of recognition, that helps maintain our relationships. Listening to our relational partners and being listened to in return is part of the give-and-take of any interpersonal relationship. Our thoughts and experiences “back up” inside of us, and getting them out helps us maintain a positive balance (Nelson, Jones, 2006). So something as routine and seemingly pointless as listening to our romantic partner debrief the events of his or her day or our roommate recount his or her weekend back home shows that we are taking an interest in their lives and are willing to put our own needs and concerns aside for a moment to attend to their needs. Listening also closely ties to conflict, as a lack of listening often plays a large role in creating conflict, while effective listening helps us resolve it.

Listening has relational implications throughout our lives, too. Parents who engage in competent listening behaviors with their children from a very young age make their children feel worthwhile and appreciated, which affects their development in terms of personality and character (Nichols, 1995).



Figure 5.3.3: Parents who exhibit competent listening behaviors toward their children provide them with a sense of recognition and security that affects their future development. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; Bindaas Madhavi via Flickr)

A lack of listening leads to feelings of loneliness, which results in lower self-esteem and higher degrees of anxiety. In fact, by

the age of four or five years old, the empathy and recognition shown by the presence or lack of listening has molded children's personalities in noticeable ways (Nichols, 1995). Children who have been listened to grow up expecting that others will be available and receptive to them. These children are therefore more likely to interact confidently with teachers, parents, and peers in ways that help develop communication competence that will be built on throughout their lives. Children who have not been listened to may come to expect that others will not want to listen to them, which leads to a lack of opportunities to practice, develop, and hone foundational communication skills. Fortunately for the more-listened-to children and unfortunately for the less-listened-to children, these early experiences become predispositions that don't change much as the children get older and may actually reinforce themselves and become stronger.

Listening and Culture

Some cultures place more importance on listening than other cultures. In general, collectivistic cultures tend to value listening more than individualistic cultures that are more speaker oriented. The value placed on verbal and nonverbal meaning also varies by culture and influences how we communicate and listen. A low-context communication style is one in which much of the meaning generated within an interaction comes from the verbal communication used rather than nonverbal or contextual cues. Conversely, much of the meaning generated by a high-context communication style comes from nonverbal and contextual cues (Lustig & Koester, 2006). For example, US Americans of European descent generally use a low-context communication style, while people in East Asian and Latin American cultures use a high-context communication style.

Contextual communication styles affect listening in many ways. Cultures with a high-context orientation generally use less verbal communication and value silence as a form of communication, which requires listeners to pay close attention to nonverbal signals and consider contextual influences on a message. Cultures with a low-context orientation must use more verbal communication and provide explicit details, since listeners aren't expected to derive meaning from the context. Note that people from low-context cultures may feel frustrated by the ambiguity of speakers from high-context cultures, while speakers from high-context cultures may feel overwhelmed or even insulted by the level of detail used by low-context communicators. Cultures with a low-context communication style also tend to have a monochronic orientation toward time, while high-context cultures have a polychronic time orientation, which also affects listening.

Cultures that favor a structured and commodified orientation toward time are said to be monochronic, while cultures that favor a more flexible orientation are polychronic. Monochronic cultures like the United States value time and action-oriented listening styles, especially in professional contexts, because time is seen as a commodity that is scarce and must be managed (McCorncack, 2007). This is evidenced by leaders in businesses and organizations who often request "executive summaries" that only focus on the most relevant information and who use statements like "Get to the point." Polychronic cultures value people and content-oriented listening styles, which makes sense when we consider that polychronic cultures also tend to be more collectivistic and use a high-context communication style. In collectivistic cultures, indirect communication is preferred in cases where direct communication would be considered a threat to the other person's face (desired public image). For example, flatly turning down a business offer would be too direct, so a person might reply with a "maybe" instead of a "no." The person making the proposal, however, would be able to draw on contextual clues that they implicitly learned through socialization to interpret the "maybe" as a "no."

Listening and Gender

Research on gender and listening has produced mixed results. As we've already learned, much of the research on gender differences and communication has been influenced by gender stereotypes and falsely connected to biological differences. More recent research has found that people communicate in ways that conform to gender stereotypes in some situations and not in others, which shows that our communication is more influenced by societal expectations than by innate or gendered "hard-wiring." For example, through socialization, men are generally discouraged from expressing emotions in public. A woman sharing an emotional experience with a man may perceive the man's lack of emotional reaction as a sign of inattentiveness, especially if he typically shows more emotion during private interactions. The man, however, may be listening but withholding nonverbal expressiveness because of social norms. He may not realize that withholding those expressions could be seen as a lack of empathetic or active listening. Researchers also dispelled the belief that men interrupt more than women do, finding that men and women interrupt each other with similar frequency in cross-gender encounters (Dindia, 1987). So men may interrupt each other more in same-gender interactions as a conscious or subconscious attempt to establish dominance because such behaviors are expected, as men are generally socialized to be more competitive than women. However, this type of competitive interrupting isn't as present in cross-gender interactions because the contexts have shifted.

Key Takeaways

- Improve listening by preparing to listen, focusing on main ideas, remembering key points, evaluating information, and responding thoughtfully.
- Practice active listening by staying focused, using verbal and nonverbal cues, taking notes, and paraphrasing to show understanding.
- Use critical listening by separating facts from opinions, checking evidence, recognizing bias, and thinking beyond the message.
- Show empathetic listening by focusing on the speaker, asking questions, avoiding unnecessary advice, and acknowledging their feelings.
- Adapt your listening to different situations (work, relationships, and cultural settings), since effective listening depends on the context.

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5.4: Listenable Messages and Effective Feedback

Facilitating Listening

We should not forget that sending messages is an important part of the listening process. Although we often think of listening as the act of receiving messages, that passive view of listening overlooks the importance of message construction and feedback. In the following section, we will learn how speakers can facilitate listening by creating listenable messages and how listeners help continue the listening process through feedback for others and themselves.

Creating Listenable Messages

Some of the listening challenges we all face would be diminished if speakers created listenable messages. Listenable messages are orally delivered messages that are tailored to be comprehended by a listener (Rubin, 1993). While most of our communication is in an "oral style," meaning spoken and intended to be heard, we sometimes create messages that are unnecessarily complex in ways that impede comprehension. Listenable messages can be contrasted with most written messages, which are meant to be read.

The way we visually process written communication is different from the way we process orally delivered and aurally received language. Aside from processing written and spoken messages differently, we also speak and write differently. This becomes a problem for listening when conventions of written language get transferred into oral messages. You may have witnessed or experienced this difficulty if you have ever tried or watched someone else try to orally deliver a message that was written to be read, not spoken. For example, when students in my classes try to deliver a direct quote from one of their research sources or speak verbatim a dictionary definition of a word, they inevitably have fluency hiccups in the form of unintended pauses or verbal trip-ups that interfere with their ability to deliver the content. These hiccups consequently make the message difficult for the audience to receive and comprehend.

This isn't typically a problem in everyday conversations, because when we speak impromptu we automatically speak in an oral style. We have a tendency, however, to stray from our natural oral style when delivering messages that we have prepared in advance—like speeches. This is because we receive much more training in creating messages to be read than we do in creating messages to be spoken. We are usually just expected to pick up the oral style of communicating through observation and trial and error. Being able to compose and deliver messages in an oral style, as opposed to a written style, is a crucial skill to develop in order to be a successful public speaker. Since most people lack specific instruction in creating messages in an oral rather than written style, you should be prepared to process messages that aren't as listenable as you would like them to be. The strategies for becoming an active listener discussed earlier in this chapter will also help you mentally repair or restructure a message to make it more listenable. As a speaker, in order to adapt your message to a listening audience and to help facilitate the listening process, you can use the following strategies to create more listenable messages:

- Use shorter, actively worded sentences.
- Use personal pronouns ("I want to show you...").
- Use lists or other organizational constructions like problem-solution, pro-con, or compare-contrast.
- Use transitions and other markers that help a listener navigate your message (time markers like "today"; order indicators like "first, second, third"; previews like "I have two things I'd like to say about that"; and reviews like "So, basically I feel like we should vacation at the lake instead of the beach because...").
- Use examples relevant to you and your listener's actual experiences.

Giving Formal Feedback to Others

The ability to give effective feedback benefits oneself and others. Whether in professional or personal contexts, positive verbal and nonverbal feedback can boost others' confidence, and negative feedback, when delivered constructively, can provide important perception checking and lead to improvements. Of course, negative feedback that is not delivered competently can lead to communication difficulties that can affect a person's self-esteem and self-efficacy. Although we rarely give formal feedback to others in interpersonal contexts, it is important to know how to give this type of feedback, as performance evaluations are common in a variety of professional, academic, and civic contexts.

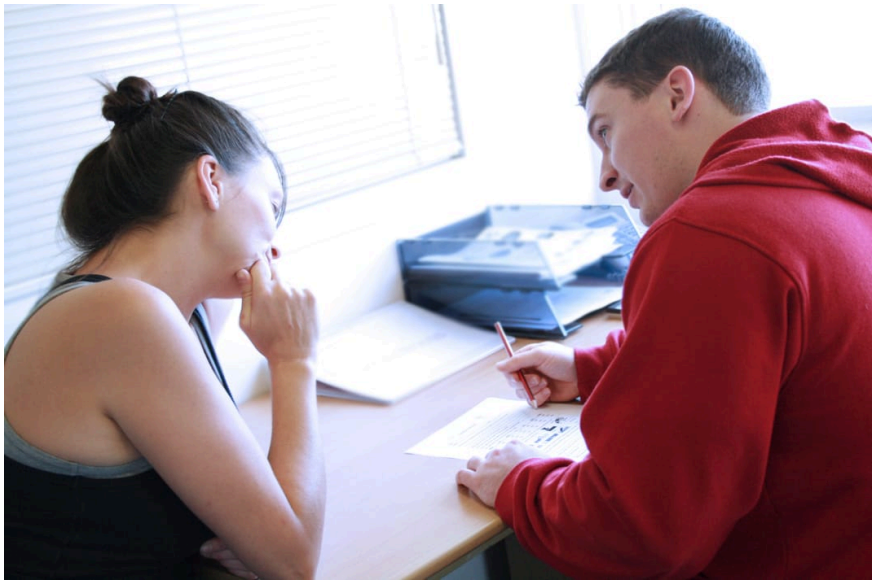


Figure 5.4.1: The ability to give verbal feedback helps personal and professional relationships grow. (CC BY-SA 3.0; www.localfitness.com.au via Wikiimedia Commons)

At some point, most people will be asked to provide feedback to another person in an academic, professional, or civic context. As companies and organizations have increasingly adopted team-based work environments over the past twenty years, peer evaluations have become a common method for assessing job performance. In higher education, for example, faculty members may be evaluated annually by tenured colleagues, department chairs, and deans, while graduate teaching assistants and peers are also evaluated as part of routine academic responsibilities. Because it is important to provide competent and relevant feedback—and because such feedback can support the receiver's self-improvement—many students are asked to complete verbal and/or written peer evaluations after classmates deliver a speech. The key to effective feedback is offering constructive criticism: comments that are specific and descriptive enough for the receiver to apply them for the purpose of self-improvement.

When Giving Feedback to Others

1. **Be specific**: A common problem with feedback on speech delivery is the lack of specific comments. Students sometimes write comments such as "Eye contact" on a peer evaluation form, but that does not provide enough information to be useful. While comments like "Good eye contact" or "Not enough eye contact" are more specific, they still are not descriptive enough to guide improvement.
2. **Be descriptive**: Descriptive comments are typically also specific because adding detail makes feedback clearer and more actionable. For example, instead of writing "Not enough eye contact," a more helpful comment would be: "You looked at your notes more than you looked at the audience during the first thirty seconds of your speech."
3. **Be positive**: When providing written feedback, write as though speaking directly to the person. Comments such as "Stop fidgeting" or "Get more sources" often sound unnecessarily harsh. Instead, frame feedback in a way that encourages improvement while minimizing defensiveness or hurt feelings.
4. **Be constructive**: Although feedback should be positive, comments such as "Good job" are not constructive because they do not provide guidance for improvement. A more useful comment might be: "You explained the company's new marketing strategy in a way that even someone outside the field could easily understand. The section on the new crisis communication plan was less clear. Breaking it down the same way you explained the marketing strategy could make it easier for people outside the public relations department to follow." This feedback is positive, specific, and constructive because it identifies both a strength and a clear opportunity for improvement.
5. **Be realistic**: Comments such as "Don't be nervous" are neither realistic nor constructive. A more helpful response might be: "The first speech is challenging for everyone, but everyone is learning together. The breathing exercises discussed in the text may help reduce nervousness before speaking." Similarly, comments such as "Your accent made it difficult for me to understand you" may reflect a need for greater listening effort, since everyone speaks with an accent. Even when speech clarity presents a challenge, changing an accent may be difficult, time-consuming, or unnecessary.
6. **Be relevant**: Feedback should relate directly to the assignment, task, or context. Comments such as "Rad nail polish" or "Nice smile," while intended as compliments, are generally not appropriate in formal evaluations unless they are directly relevant to the purpose of the assessment.

Giving Formal Feedback to Yourself

An effective way to improve our communication competence is to give ourselves feedback on specific communication skills. Self-evaluation can be difficult, because people may think their performance was effective and therefore doesn't need critique, or they may become their own worst critic, which can negatively affect self-efficacy. The key to effective self-evaluation is to identify strengths and weaknesses, to evaluate yourself within the context of the task, and to set concrete goals for future performance.

When Giving Feedback to Yourself

1. **Identify strengths and weaknesses**: People often have a tendency to be their own worst critics, so self-evaluations should avoid nit-picking or focusing too heavily on one aspect of communication that feels particularly noticeable or frustrating. The issue being criticized may not be as noticeable—or may not be noticed at all—by others. For example, a student once wrote a self-critique in which about 90 percent of the evaluation focused on how red his face appeared during a recorded speech. Although this detail was highly noticeable to him while watching the video, it was unlikely to have been a significant concern for audience members.
2. **Evaluate yourself within the context of the task or assignment guidelines**: Self-evaluations should focus on the skills and expectations relevant to the assignment. If a speech assignment asks students to discuss their personal lives in a creative way, the evaluation should not focus primarily on delivery elements such as gestures. Speakers often overanalyze aspects of delivery that account for only part of a message's overall effectiveness while under-analyzing the presentation of key ideas and content. If the goal is to present complex technical information clearly, for example, the evaluation could focus on the use of examples and strategies for making concepts relevant to listeners.
3. **Set goals for next time**: Goal setting is important because clear benchmarks provide a way to measure progress. Once goals are achieved, they can become part of an ongoing skill set, increasing confidence and supporting the development of more advanced skills.
4. **Revisit goals and assess progress at regular intervals**: Goals are not always achieved immediately, so they should be reviewed periodically to evaluate progress. If a goal has not been met, identify possible reasons and develop an action plan for continued improvement. If a goal has been achieved, use that success as a foundation for building confidence and pursuing future goals.

Key Takeaways

- To create listenable messages, which are orally delivered messages tailored to be comprehended by a listener, avoid long, complex sentences; use personal pronouns; use lists or other organizational constructions; use transitions and other markers to help your listener navigate your message; and use relevant examples.
- Getting integrated: Although we rarely give formal feedback in interpersonal contexts, we give informal feedback regularly to our relational partners that can enhance or detract from their self-esteem and affect our relationships. While we also give informal feedback in academic, professional, and civic contexts, it is common practice to give formal feedback in the form of performance evaluations or general comments on an idea, product, or presentation.
- When giving feedback to others, be specific, descriptive, positive, constructive, realistic, and relevant.
- When giving feedback to yourself, identify strengths and weaknesses, evaluate yourself within the contexts of the task or assignment, set goals for next time, and revisit goals to access progress.

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5.5: Chapter Wrap-Up

This chapter explores the importance of listening as a central part of communication and explains that effective listening is much more than simply hearing words. Listening is an active process that involves receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to both verbal and nonverbal messages. Each stage of listening requires attention and effort, as listeners must take in information, create meaning, remember important details, judge the credibility of messages, and provide appropriate feedback. The chapter emphasizes that listening affects academic success, professional opportunities, relationships, and everyday interactions because strong listening skills help people understand others and communicate more effectively.

The chapter also examines the many barriers that can interfere with effective listening. Environmental distractions, physical discomfort, stress, personal biases, and differences between speech rate and thought rate can all reduce a person's ability to fully engage with a message. Technology and media multitasking create additional challenges by dividing attention and making it harder to receive, interpret, and remember information. The chapter discusses several ineffective listening behaviors, including interrupting, distorted listening, eavesdropping, aggressive listening, narcissistic listening, and pseudo-listening. Recognizing these barriers and habits is an important step toward becoming a more intentional and competent listener.

Improving listening requires developing skills that support different listening situations. Active listening involves using both mental focus and visible behaviors, such as eye contact, appropriate feedback, note-taking, paraphrasing, and asking questions. Critical listening helps individuals evaluate messages by separating facts from opinions, examining evidence, recognizing personal biases, and considering the purpose behind a message. Empathetic listening focuses on understanding another person's thoughts and feelings without immediately judging, giving advice, or shifting attention back to oneself. The chapter explains that adapting listening styles and strategies to different contexts can improve communication in professional, personal, and cultural settings.

Another major focus of the chapter is the role that speakers play in supporting effective listening. Communication is not only the responsibility of the listener; speakers can make messages easier to understand by creating listenable messages that are organized, clear, and suited for oral communication. Using shorter sentences, personal examples, transitions, and effective organization can help audiences process information more successfully. The chapter also highlights the importance of giving and receiving feedback. Constructive feedback should be specific, descriptive, positive, realistic, and relevant, while self-evaluation should focus on identifying strengths, improving weaknesses, and setting goals for future growth.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates that listening is a complex communication skill that requires awareness, practice, and adaptation. Effective listeners must manage distractions, challenge their own assumptions, understand different perspectives, and respond in ways that encourage meaningful communication. Whether in classrooms, workplaces, relationships, or cross-cultural interactions, strong listening skills help create understanding, build trust, and improve the quality of communication between people.

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5.7: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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5.7.1: Exercises

5.1: Understanding How and Why We Listen

1. The recalling stage of the listening process is a place where many people experience difficulties. What techniques do you use or could you use to improve your recall of certain information such as people's names, key concepts from your classes, or instructions or directions given verbally?
2. Getting integrated: Identify how critical listening might be useful for you in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.
3. Listening scholars have noted that empathetic listening is the most difficult type of listening. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Which style of listening best describes you and why? Which style do you have the most difficulty with or like the least, and why?

5.2: Barriers to Effective Listening

1. We are capable of thinking faster than the speed at which the average person speaks, which allows us some room to put mental faculties toward things other than listening. What typically makes your mind wander?
2. Bad speakers and messages are a common barrier to effective listening. Describe a time recently when your ability to listen was impaired by the poor delivery and/or content of another person.
3. Of the bad listening practices listed, which do you use the most? Why do you think you use this one more than the others? What can you do to help prevent or lessen this barrier?

5.3: Improving Listening Competence

1. Keep a "listening log" for part of your day. Note times when you feel like you exhibited competent listening behaviors and note times when listening became challenging. Analyze the log based on what you have learned in this section. Which positive listening skills helped you listen? What strategies could you apply to your listening challenges to improve your listening competence?
2. Apply the strategies for effective critical listening to a political message (a search for "political speech" or "partisan speech" on YouTube should provide you with many options). As you analyze the speech, make sure to distinguish between facts and inferences, evaluate a speaker's supporting evidence, discuss how your own biases may influence your evaluation, and think beyond the message.
3. Discuss and analyze the listening environment of a place you have worked or an organization with which you were involved. Overall, was it positive or negative? What were the norms and expectations for effective listening that contributed to the listening environment? Who helped set the tone for the listening environment?

5.4: Listenable Messages and Effective Feedback

1. Apply the strategies for creating listenable messages to a speech you recently gave or a speech you are currently working on. Which strategies did/will you employ? Why?
2. Recall an instance in which someone gave you feedback that didn't meet the guidelines that are listed in this section. In what ways did the person's feedback fall short of the guidelines, and what could the person have done to improve the feedback?
3. Using the guidelines for self-evaluation (feedback to self), assess one of your recent speeches. If you haven't given a speech recently, assess another communication skill using the same guidelines, such as your listening abilities or your skill at providing constructive criticism.

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5.7.2: Discussion Questions

5.1: Understanding How and Why We Listen

1. The chapter explains that listening is a process rather than a single act. Why is it important to understand listening as an ongoing process with multiple stages? How might this perspective change the way you think about your own listening habits?

2. Compare the four types of listening—discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic. In what situations would each type be the most effective, and what might happen if you used the wrong type of listening in a particular situation?

3. The chapter describes four listening styles: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented. Which listening style do you think best describes you most of the time? What are the strengths and potential limitations of that style?

4. The text discusses the importance of responding through behaviors such as back-channel cues, paraphrasing, and clarifying questions. Which of these responding behaviors do you use most often, and how do they influence the quality of your conversations?

5.2: Barriers to Effective Listening

1. The chapter identifies several barriers to effective listening, including environmental, physical, cognitive, and personal barriers. Which of these do you think is the greatest obstacle to effective listening for college students today? Explain your reasoning and provide examples.

2. The text explains that people can think much faster than others can speak. How does the difference between speech rate and thought rate create listening challenges, and what strategies could help listeners stay focused?

3. The chapter discusses both the benefits and drawbacks of media multitasking. Do you think technology generally helps or hinders effective listening? Support your position using concepts from the chapter.

5.3: Improving Listening Competence

1. The chapter presents strategies for improving listening competence at each stage of the listening process. Which stage do you think is the most challenging to improve, and which specific strategies from the chapter would be the most effective for strengthening that stage?

2. The text explains that active listening includes both cognitive strategies and outward behaviors. Which active listening behaviors do you think have the greatest impact on making a speaker feel heard, and why?

3. The chapter discusses the differences between critical listening and empathetic listening. How can a communicator decide when to focus on critically evaluating a message and when to focus on understanding the speaker's perspective?

5.4: Listenable Messages and Effective Feedback

1. The chapter outlines several guidelines for giving formal feedback to others. Which guideline do you think is the most important for helping someone improve their communication skills? Explain your reasoning.

2. The chapter emphasizes the value of self-evaluation after speaking. Why is it important to identify both strengths and weaknesses rather than focusing on only one or the other? How can setting specific goals contribute to improvement?

3. Why is it important for speakers to create listenable messages instead of simply reading material written to be read? Which strategy for creating listenable messages do you think is most effective, and why?

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6: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Overview

Interpersonal communication is the process by which people exchange information, feelings, and meaning through verbal and non-verbal messages. (Arkansas State University, 2022). It is principally done in face-to-face interactions between two or more individuals, but in our current information age, it also occurs in virtual form, such as via phone, text, email, and video calls. It involves both spoken language and non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and gestures.

Interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in shaping the quality and dynamics of all types of relationships, whether they are friendships, professional relationships, platonic, romantic, or familial. In the workplace, effective interpersonal communication fosters collaboration, helps to reduce misunderstandings, builds trust and cohesiveness among team members, and enhances productivity and workplace morale. Among friends, it is an essential component of sharing experiences, offering support, and maintaining a sense of mutual understanding and trust. In romantic relationships, it allows partners to express emotions, resolve conflicts, and deepen their emotional connection. Within families, strong interpersonal communication fosters openness, strengthens bonds, and facilitates the navigation of generational or cultural differences. As a whole, interpersonal communication is the foundation through which individuals convey thoughts, emotions, expectations, and boundaries. When we develop and practice strong interpersonal communication skills, such as active listening vs. passive listening, empathy, clarity, and assertiveness vs. aggressiveness, we are better equipped to share our thoughts, handle conflict, express appreciation or dissatisfaction, and respond to the needs of others. This leads to healthier, more meaningful, and resilient relationships across all areas of life.

Almost every part of society is influenced by interpersonal communication; therefore, becoming proficient in healthy techniques of interpersonal skills can prove to be both personally and professionally beneficial to us.

This chapter focuses on interpersonal communication in relationships. We'll explore five areas of application of this valuable skill set, which are: conflict management and resolution, workplace communication, the dark side of interpersonal communication and friendships, and romance. The next several pages will offer a crisper view of the role that interpersonal communication, once referred to as "soft skills," has now assumed on a global and commercial scale.

Chapter Goals

- Define and identify the main functions of interpersonal relationships in the workplace
- Explore interpersonal relationships in friendships and romantic partnerships.
- Define interpersonal conflict, conflict goals, and conflict outcomes.
- Explain the importance of cultural intelligence and how to create better intercultural interactions.
- Examine darker behaviors within interpersonal relationships.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized key terms and concepts that appear throughout the material. These essential ideas are bolded when first introduced and may reappear in later sections or chapters, so it's a good idea to study them closely. Each term is explained in its context and can be a helpful reference as you continue learning about the topic.

Keywords

- Additional Factors
- Affectionate
- Affectionate Communication
- Altruism
- Argument
- Associative Friendships
- Avoiding
- Bias

- Boundaries
- Bullying
- Career Functions
- Collaborating
- Collectivistic Culture
- Conflict
- Conflict Management
- Concern for Self
- Concern for Others
- Cognitive CQ
- Cyberbullying
- Directness
- Disagreement
- Dominating
- Equal
- Endurance Test
- Environmental Factors
- Explicit Bias
- Face
- Friendship
- Gender Bias
- Harassment
- High-Context Culture
- Indirect Suggestions
- Individualism
- Individualistic Culture
- Integrating
- Interactional Factors
- Internet Infidelity
- Laterally
- Low-Context Culture
- Maintenance
- Mentor
- Mentoring Enactment Theory
- Metacognitive CQ
- Motivational CQ
- Mutual
- Network Overlap
- Obliging
- Organizational Communication
- Organizational Expectations
- Pay-it-forward
- Reciprocal Friendships
- Receptive Friendships
- Personal
- Physical Bullying
- Presenting the Relationship to Outsiders
- Racial Bias
- Relational Aggression
- Relational Bullying
- Secret Tests
- Separation Test
- Sexual Harassment
- Social Exchange Theory
- Situational Factors
- Supervisor
- Tolerance for Disagreement

- Third Party Test
- Triangle Test
- Uncertainty Reduction Theory
- Unconscious Bias
- Verbal Aggression
- Verbal Bullying
- Vertically
- Voluntary
- Workplace Romances

6.1: Interpersonal Conflict Management and Resolution
6.2: Interpersonal Communication in the Workplace
6.3: Culture in Interpersonal Communication
6.4: The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication
6.5: Communication in Friendship and Romantic Relationships
6.6: Chapter Wrap-Up
6.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 6
6.8: References
6.9: Teacher Resources
6.9.1: Exercises
6.9.2: Discussion Questions

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6.1: Interpersonal Conflict Management and Resolution

Negotiation of Conflict

In 2021, news stories were dominated by the “Free Britney” movement and the battles between Britney Spears and her family. In November 2021, a judge terminated the conservatorship that had controlled the last 15 years of her life. She publicly blamed her family, saying, “They hurt me deeper than you will ever know,” and severed her ties with her parents and sister. This case, which held the attention of fans around the world, is an example of both interpersonal and family conflict, centering on issues of power and control. Most of us, hopefully, will never experience a conflict that is so severe and so public. But the underlying themes of conflict in this family dilemma are more common than one might expect.

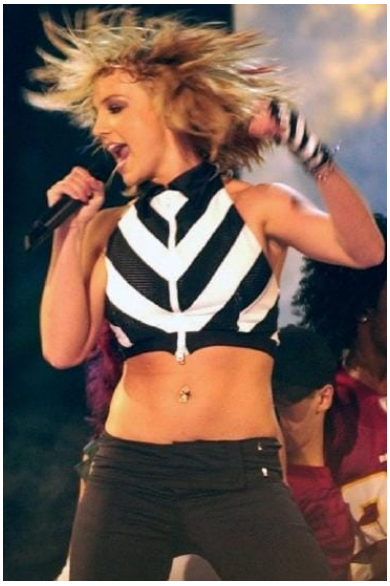


Figure 6.1.1 Singer Britney Spears, seen here performing at the NFL Live Kickoff, was embroiled in a public conflict over a conservatorship over her vast fortune. (CC01.0; Seth Rossman via Wikimedia Commons)

When was the last time you had a disagreement, argument, or conflict with someone you cared about? Whether a conflict is minor, such as whether the dishwasher has been loaded properly, or major, such as dealing with issues of money, child-rearing, and relationship expectations, chances are you recently experienced interpersonal conflict. Communication and conflict are interwoven and affect most interpersonal relationships at some time, including, but not limited to, romantic partnerships, family, friends, and co-workers. Communication is a key component of interpersonal conflict in that communication behaviors can create conflict, reflect conflict, and serve as the instrument that delivers productive and unproductive conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018). This chapter will call on you to reflect on your conflict patterns and to develop communication skills to help you navigate conflict more effectively in the future.

Conflict vs. Disagreement

It is necessary to differentiate a conflict from a disagreement. A **disagreement** is a difference of opinion and often occurs during an **argument** is a verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects. It’s important to realize that arguments are not conflicts, but if they become verbally aggressive, they can quickly turn into conflicts. One factor that ultimately can help determine if an argument will escalate into a conflict is an individual’s tolerance for disagreement. James McCroskey, along with his colleagues, initially defined **tolerance for disagreement**, such as whether an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted. People who have a high tolerance for disagreement can easily discuss opinions with pretty much anyone and realize that arguing is perfectly normal and, for some, even entertaining. People who have a low tolerance for disagreement feel personally attacked any time someone is perceived as devaluing their opinion. From an interpersonal perspective, understanding someone’s tolerance for disagreement can help in deciding if arguments will be perceived by the other as attacks that could lead to verbally aggressive conflicts.

However, not all conflict is necessarily verbally aggressive or destructive.

The term “conflict” is very difficult to pin down. Simplistically, **conflict** is an interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations, resources, and/or values. First, conflict is interactive and inherently communicative. Second, two or more people or even groups of people who can think must be involved. Lastly, there is a whole range of different areas where people can have opposing or incompatible opinions. For this generic definition, we provided a laundry list of different types of incompatibility that can exist between two or more individuals or groups. Is this list completely exhaustive? No. But we provided this list as a way of thinking about the more common types of issues that are raised when people engage in conflict. From this perspective, everything from a minor disagreement to a knock-down, drag-out fight would be classified as a conflict.

The rest of this section is going to explore the nature of conflict and its importance in communication. To do this, we’ll discuss two different perspectives on conflict (disruption vs. normalcy). Then we’ll explore interpersonal conflict more closely. Lastly, we’ll discuss the positive and negative functions of conflict.

Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Conflict

The pervasiveness of conflict in everyday life provides a strong justification for studying interpersonal conflict. There are several personal benefits you may receive from studying interpersonal conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018).

- Conflict management skills are not inborn; rather, they are learned. By studying interpersonal conflict, you can learn helpful relational skills for peaceful conflict resolution.
- Mental health may be improved as constructive approaches to conflict are practiced.
- Family relationships and overall well-being are linked to constructive conflict management.
- Long-term marital satisfaction may depend on effective conflict management.
- Romantic partners who practice positive conflict management are more likely to have happy relationships (Cramer, 2000).
- Workplace relationships are characterized by conflict in almost 85% of employees surveyed (1995). Learning effective conflict negotiation skills can help improve the quality of your work life.
- Victims of abuse benefit from examining alternative constructive models of conflict.

Five Approaches to Conflict Management

Conflict management is the process of trying to find effective strategies to minimize and solve problems associated with different conflict goals. When we look at how we negotiate conflict in our relationships, we find that typical patterns of communication occur. Your style of conflict management style is shaped by a variety of factors, such as your gender, age, culture, personality, family communication patterns, and goals for the situation. Furthermore, your conflict management style is a mix of factors, such as your nonverbal signals (eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice), the verbal message you use, and your focus on concern for yourself versus concern for the other party.

Your concern for yourself versus your concern for the other person will shape how you approach a conflict, the strategies you use to negotiate, and the outcome you desire (win-win, etc.). **Concern for self** refers to the degree to which you try to meet your own needs and goals in a conflict situation. **Concern for others** refers to the degree to which you try to meet the needs of the other person in the conflict.

Example 6.1.1 Concern for Others vs. Concern for Self

Scenario: Tony is a manager at a large retail store in the mall. He displays **great concern for others** when making the weekly schedule, respecting his employees' school schedules and family lives.

Impact: Tony and his employees are developing a relationship of mutual respect and empathy.

Scenario: Tony's counterpart, Alyssa, demonstrates **great concern for herself** in demanding that employees miss school and family events to give her the best schedule. Various combinations of concern for self versus concern for others result in five conflict management styles, including integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising (Rahim, 2000). In this section, we examine five approaches to conflict management. Take some time to reflect on your approach to conflict and see if you can identify your style.

Impact: Alyssa may have trouble down the road and possibly have a high turnover rate, as some employees might find her approach too dominating and inflexible, and thus quit working for her.

Integrating

If you display great concern for your own needs, while at the same time honoring the needs of others, you may prefer the **integrating** style of conflict management (Rahim, 1983a). Integrating, also known as **collaborating** (see Kilman & Thomas, 1977) consists of problem-solving, open communication, open confrontation of conflict, assertiveness, and cooperation (Rahim, 2010). Integrating may be the best approach for resolving conflict when two people who live or work closely together need to solve a problem (such as agreement on how to raise children), when buy-in is needed from the other person (such as a couple agreeing on a car purchase), for long-term planning (such as planning to have children), and when dealing with strategies for solving problems. Although research has shown that an integrative approach to conflict is associated with satisfying relationships, it may not be appropriate when dealing with small issues, when quick decisions are needed, when people do not care about the outcomes, and when people lack problem-solving training (Rahim, 2010). If you try to solve every problem with an integrative approach, you may find yourself and the other party exhausted by the constant emphasis on conflict.

Example 6.1.2 Collaborating Style of Conflict Management

Scenario: When Sophia and AJ experience a conflict, they tend to view it as an opportunity to understand each other better, and they sit down and try to tackle the issue together. This is known as an integrating or a collaborating approach to conflict.

Impact: The collaborative approach applied by Sophia and AJ will strengthen their relationship by fostering trust, mutual understanding, and effective problem-solving.

Obliging

Do you ever find yourself sacrificing your needs to make someone else happy or to keep the peace in the relationship? This is known as the **obliging** or accommodating style of conflict management, which consists of high concern for others and low concern for self (Rahim, 1983a). We use an obliging approach for a variety of reasons, including that we don't find the conflict to be important, we want to keep harmony in the relationship, or we lack the assertive communication skills to advocate for our own needs. Obliging can be an appropriate response to conflict when the conflict is more important to the other person, when you are willing to make a sacrifice now in return for something later when you have less power in the relationship, or when you are wrong (Rahim, 2001). Obliging can be beneficial to keeping the peace. An interesting study looked at how members in a university medical department resolved their conflicts and found that an obliging style was related to low levels of workplace stress and low levels of perceived conflict (Friedman et al., 2000).

Example 6.1.3 Obliging Style of Conflict Management

Scenario: Naomi has many friends and is considered easy to get along with. She often finds herself going along with the wishes of others, whether it's her parents or her close friends. Naomi displays a high concern for others and a low concern for herself and is therefore obliging others, perhaps as a means of avoiding conflict.

Impact: Naomi's obliging approach may maintain harmony in her relationships, but it can lead to her own needs being overlooked.

Dominating

Have you ever met someone who needs to always be right? They might be exhibiting the **dominating** style of conflict management, which occurs when we focus on our own needs at the expense of others (Rahim, 1983a). People who practice a dominating approach may ignore the needs of others, be inflexible, try to win at all costs, and use their position of power to impose their will upon others (Rahim et al., 2000). There are times in life when we may need to use a dominating style of conflict management, such as when the outcome of the conflict might be harmful to you, or if you are involved in an inherently competitive situation, such as a job interview where only one person can get the job. Regular use of a dominating approach to a conflict may be harmful to interpersonal relationships in that it may lead the losing party to feel unhappy in the relationship.

Example 6.1.4 Dominating Style of Conflict Management

Scenario: Bella's friend Damien loves to debate every little topic, from climate change to the best local fast-food burger joint, and he will not let the conversation drop until Bella gives in. This approach is competitive, with a win-lose orientation to conflict.

Impact: Damien's competitive and dominating approach may create tension and strain in his friendship with Bella.

Avoiding

Have you ever been in a situation where you chose not to deal with a conflict? This is known as an **avoiding** approach to conflict, which consists of physical and emotional evasion of topics, situations, and people that evoke conflict. This approach consists of a low concern for self and a low concern for others, and is sometimes viewed negatively in US culture. However, other cultures might not view avoidance negatively, as this approach may be used to preserve harmony in relationships and contribute to maintaining long-term relationships (Ting-Toomey, 1988). This approach to a conflict may be appropriate if the issue is of little importance to you, if you or the other person needs time to cool off, or if the disadvantages outweigh the benefits of confrontation (Rahim, 2001). Avoidance is not appropriate when quick action is needed on your part, when decision-making is required, or when parties are "unwilling to wait" (Rahim, 2010, p. 54)

Example 6.1.5 Avoiding Style of Conflict Management

Scenario: Delaney is angry with her two closest friends. Rather than dealing with it, she blocked them on all her social media accounts. This may be viewed negatively in US Culture, but may be an acceptable form of conflict management elsewhere in the world.

Impact: Delaney's avoidance may protect her from immediate conflict, but could potentially cause more damage due to suppressed feelings of anger between her and her friends over time.

Compromising

In US culture, many of us have been taught to solve our problems by **compromising**, sharing, or splitting the difference. The compromising style of conflict management consists of medium concern for self and medium concern for others. This approach involves finding a middle ground in the conflict situation. Compromising can be effective when you and the other person have equal power, when you need a quick and temporary solution, when you can't reach a consensus, and when your conflicting goals are mutually exclusive. Although compromising may have many benefits for finding quick solutions, it is not always perfect. Ongoing use of compromising can lead you to feel like your needs are not being met. Furthermore, compromise can be ineffective when there are power imbalances (such as a boss and employee), problems are complex (such as deciding how to pay for college), long-term solutions are needed, or when dealing with value conflicts (such as values of family, commitment, and trust) (Rahim, 2001).

Example 6.1.6 Compromising Style of Conflict Management

Scenario: Javier and Jeff tend to argue over what movie they would like to see; rather than battling it out each week, they have decided to take turns choosing the movie of the week. This means that every other week, Javier must see a movie that he would not have chosen on his own. Javier and Jeff each display medium concern for themselves and medium concern for each other.

Impact: The compromising approach between Javier and Jeff allows fairness and reduces conflict, though it may leave both only partially satisfied.

Understanding your conflict management styles can provide insight into how to improve conflict encounters (Conerly & Tripathi, 2004). No one style is better than others; rather, we should consider adjusting our style based on our goals, the other person in the conflict, and the needs of the situation. It is important to be aware that styles can be perceived differently (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). There are divergent cultural expectations of conflict, and you may be perceived differently based on your gender, age, race, and situation. For example, there are other cultural variations when it comes to preference for conflict styles, such as emotionally expressive responses, seeking out third parties, or using a passive-aggressive approach to sidestep confrontation of the conflict (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). A study of 200 college students working in teams found that the students perceived integrating as the most effective and avoiding as an ineffective and inappropriate response to conflict. Within marriages, satisfied couples report using integrating, compromising, and obliging styles, and less satisfied couples report using dominating and avoiding styles of conflict management (Rahim et al., 2004).

Having an understanding of your conflict management style, as well as the approach used by people in your life, can help you navigate what can sometimes be a frustrating experience. In addition to understanding your conflict management style, it is important to understand responses to conflict that can aggravate the conflict, or worse, lead to the dissolution of the relationship. In the next section, you will learn about the “Four Horsemen of the Relationship Apocalypse” and common unproductive conflict behaviors.

Try This 6.1.1 What Would You Do?

You have reviewed the different styles of conflict management, and now it is time to reflect on what you have learned and practice applying it. Please read each of the five scenarios below and choose the response that you most likely would have. Your answer should reflect what you think you *would* do, not what you think you *should* do. Keep track of your choices for each item.

Scenario 1: Divorce Dilemma

You are a single parent. Ever since the divorce, you have been trying to better connect with your teenage son, Tamer. You’ve noticed that he has been a bit distant and has been lying to you about where and who he’s been hanging out with. You text Tamer that you’d like to talk over the weekend about his recent behaviors. You look at your phone, and the text indicates “read,” yet Tamer hasn't texted you back or brought up the text to you when you see him the next day. How do you respond?

1. Skip the conversation; you don't want to ruin the weekend.
2. Gently suggest to Tamer that you would appreciate it if he would respond to your text messages.
3. Tell Tamer that, as the parent, you are responsible for his well-being. Insist that he explain his recent pattern of lying and his failure to respond to texts, or you will take away his phone.
4. Propose a middle ground such that if Tamer agrees to respond to your texts quickly, you will agree to give him more freedom in how he spends his time.
5. Try to empathize and understand how Tamer is feeling, and then propose that you develop some guidelines together for family communication.

Scenario 2: Social Media

Your best friend has a habit of posting unflattering pictures of you on their social media account. You have asked them to stop, but the problem has continued. If you let them know an image bothers you, they are quick to remove it. Your friend has now posted a picture that you find embarrassing, and you want this practice to stop. How do you respond?

1. Say nothing and suffer in silence. They haven't stopped, and you doubt they ever will.
2. Try to get over it and not be so self-conscious.
3. Threaten your friend that if they don't stop, you will start posting embarrassing pictures of them.
4. Try to find a middle ground and ask your friend to agree that you will both share pictures before posting.
5. Wait until a suitable time to sit down with your friend and talk about the situation. Listen to their side of the story and then disclose how this is making you feel. Work towards a solid solution you can both agree on.

Scenario 3: Money Matters

Your closest friend always seems to be short of cash. Recently, their dog got sick, and as a result of the vet bills, they asked you to spot them $50 so they could pay for their gas. They promised to pay you back on Friday, but a week later, they still have not paid you. How do you respond?

1. Put off talking about it. It just doesn't seem like a good time.
2. Let it go since your friendship is worth more to you than $50.
3. Threaten your friend that if they do not pay you back, you are going to cut off the relationship.
4. Instead of paying you back, ask them to complete some repairs around your house in exchange.
5. Sit down and talk to your friend. Try to understand the problem, then propose a repayment plan.

Scenario 4: Helicopter Parent

Your parents have been extremely hands-on and supportive throughout your childhood, coaching sports, volunteering in your classes, and helping you prepare for college. Now that you have entered college, your parents are insisting on choosing your major, and it is a field you are not interested in. Your parents have told you that if you do not major in their chosen field, they will not pay for your college expenses. How do you respond?

1. Do nothing. You are afraid of your parents' response.
2. Accept your parents' decision, as they are paying for your college expenses, and you want to make them happy.
3. Tell your parents that they are being unreasonable. If that is how they feel, you will move out and pay for your education.
4. Propose taking a class in each field and then reporting back to your parents.
5. Listen to your parents to try to understand their point of view, and then share with them the career opportunities for your major to see if you can reach an agreement.

Scenario 5: Holiday Drama

You and your significant other are looking forward to celebrating the holidays together—until you realize that both your families celebrate on the same day and at the same time. This conflict is creating a lot of frustration for you and your partner. How do you respond?

1. Say nothing and celebrate with your family. It's not worth the trouble at this time to change.
2. Agree to spend the holidays with your partner's family. It seems like your partner cares more about the issue than you do.
3. Demand that if your partner cares about you and your future together, they will make the effort to spend this holiday with your family.
4. Propose that you and your partner spend half of the day with your family and half of the day with their family.
5. Set aside a good time to talk and empathize with your partner. Discuss developing a plan for how and where you will spend the holidays together.

Scenario 6: Extroverts and Introverts

Your significant other likes to go out to clubs and parties and have friends over, but you are much more introverted. You would rather stay in, study for school, play video games, or watch movies. One day, your partner tells you that they feel like they are missing out on their social life, and they want to talk about how you spend time together. You are afraid they will break up with you. How do you respond?

1. Avoid your partner so you don't have to deal with the problem in the middle of the semester.
2. Give in and agree to start going to parties and clubs to keep them happy.
3. Tell your partner they are being selfish for trying to change you and refusing to socialize with their friends.

4. Agree to start going out more if your partner is also willing to learn about your favorite video game.
5. Ask your partner to talk to see if you can work together to make some adjustments and find some activities outside of the house that you can enjoy together.

Results

Tally up the number of As, Bs, Cs, Ds, and Es you selected. Your answers indicate your preference for managing conflict.

- The majority of A answers indicate a preference for avoidance
- The majority of B answers indicate a preference for obliging
- The majority of C answers indicate a preference for competition
- The majority of D answers indicate a preference for compromising
- The majority of E answers indicate a preference for integrating
- Mixed answers: If you have a tie or two close scores, it may indicate that you are skilled in more than one style and adapt based on the needs of the situation.

Discussion and Reflection

As we can see from these scenarios, there are many different ways to respond to conflict. Having an understanding of your own and others' conflict styles can help you choose the best approach to achieving peaceful and meaningful conflict resolution. Take a moment to reflect on your conflict preferences.

1. What are the potential strengths of your style preference?
2. What are the potential weaknesses of your style preference?
3. Explain which of the five styles you would like to work on developing.

- Scenarios by Angela Hoppe-Nagao and Eric Alan Weidner (2022) CC BY 4.0

Key Takeaways:

- Conflict is a normal part of relationships, but it differs from simple disagreements.
- Disagreements involve differing opinions, while conflicts arise when those disagreements escalate or involve incompatible goals, needs, or values. How people perceive and tolerate disagreement often determines whether it stays a discussion or turns into conflict.
- Conflict management styles shape relationship outcomes.
- The five main styles—integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising—are influenced by concern for self versus concern for others. No one style is "best" in all situations; effectiveness depends on context, goals, and the people involved.
- Learning conflict resolution skills enhances mental health, strengthens family and romantic relationships, improves workplace dynamics, and provides healthier alternatives to destructive conflict behaviors.

Attributions

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6.2: Interpersonal Communication in the Workplace

Workplace Relationships

Interpersonal Communication within the workplace is a vast ocean of interactivity between and among colleagues at varying levels of the corporate ladder. The area is so broad that it has generated its own branch of study called **organizational communication.** Organizational communication is studied extensively in the field of Communication Studies; some universities even offer it as an independent degree. As a field of study and practice, it usually pertains to internal communications within an organization, such as messaging regarding an organization's mission, or any kind of employee training. It can also include the various types of interpersonal communication that occur between management and employees in the workplace, as well as professional communication such as emails, announcements, and company documentation. It also includes a less spoken-about but frequently occurring situation, which is workplace romance. Organizational communication can also include messaging that is more externally focused, such as public relations/public release documents, marketing materials, or branding. Interpersonal communication intersects with organizational communication in many ways. However, in this chapter, we will focus specifically on the types of relationships you will encounter in the workplace and the workplace dynamics you need to be aware of as you navigate those relationships. First, to acquaint you with this chapter, we will discuss in the next section why understanding the nuances of interpersonal communication in the workplace is to your advantage.

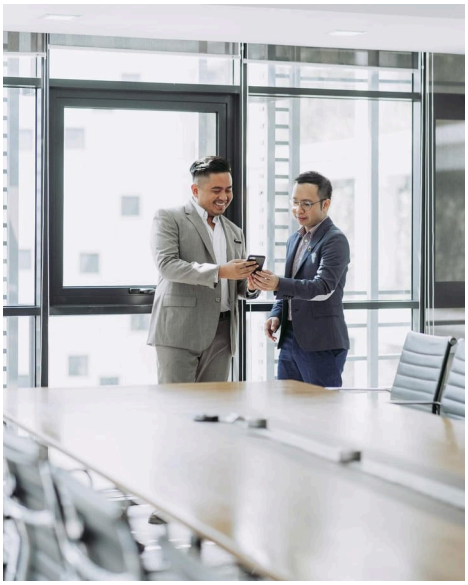


Figure 6.2.1: Two colleagues debrief the minutes from a work meeting. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Muhammad Faiz Zulkeflee via Unsplash)

Interpersonal relationships in the workplace are an inescapable reality for individuals working within the context of an organization. The need to belong provides an integrative framework and a motivating force for positive interpersonal relationships at work. (Reich & Hershcovis, 2011). Interpersonal Communication is present in various sectors of an organization. It exists among colleagues at work who develop friendships. It exists in romantic relationships that sometimes develop among colleagues who become more closely connected while working together. Interpersonal communication also occurs between mentors and their supervisors.

Friendships in the Workplace

Friends can bring us so much joy. You can laugh, commiserate, and feel supported with a friend. Interestingly, many sources show us that work is the number-one place people make friends (Morgan, 2020). When you combine the joy of friendship with the need for many of us to maintain a job, having a friend at work can make the workplace more intrinsically rewarding and help alleviate job-related stress. Friendships at work can be incredibly beneficial for us and for our employers. Research from King (2020) tells us that "those who have close friends at work are more efficient in and satisfied with their jobs," later pointing to research that states "that if one of your colleagues is a 'best' friend, you're seven times more engaged at work than the average person" (Beard,

2020).



Figure 6.2.2: Five women in New York work as colleagues and friends, making signs for the Women's March in 2018 (CC BY 2.0; Cordelia Persen via Wikimedia Commons)

The **Uncertainty reduction theory** (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) is the idea that human beings utilize certain communication strategies to reduce uncertainty toward other people. For example, on the first day of class, a professor might have a fun icebreaker activity such as "Tell me your current favorite show on Netflix" before taking roll and meeting their new students. This same strategy can be applied in the workplace, where perceived similarity and self-disclosure play important roles in the formation of workplace relationships. Most co-workers are nearby, often working mere feet from one another for eight or more hours a day, but they may create smaller cliques based on department, age, parental status, or interests (Sias, 2005). These subgroups can create a sense of belonging or happiness for workers, who can connect with their co-workers on an interpersonal level. In research by Gallup, when employees were asked to consider their workplace relationship with their managers, there was a strong correlation between employee engagement and a positive working relationship (Crabtree, 2004).

A lot of us derive most of our social needs from those work relationships. They're what give people a sense of belonging in their job. Sometimes, there's an idea that when you're spending time with friends at work, you won't get anything done, but the research says that employee happiness depends on social interactions.

In that same poll, of the engaged employees, 49% strongly agree that "A strong positive relationship with [my boss] is crucial to my success at work" (Crabtree, 2004, para. 14). Further research points to the support that can be gained from positive connections like receiving help, guidance, advice, feedback, and recommendations from colleagues like bosses, friends, and cubicle mates (Hamilton, 2007). Therefore, this section will help us explore why we seek out relationships at work, what influences our relationships with those we work with, and how friendships and romantic relationships can add value—and cause harm—to our workspace.

We have talked about the benefits of workplace friendships. But we would be remiss to not mention the research about the downfalls of friendship in the workplace. We know that through self-disclosure, we gain access to others' personal lives and emotions. In the moment, it may serve both members to have access to such intimate information. However, if the friendship changes—either because of conflict or because one friend changes roles at the company, such as moving up the corporate ladder—this interpersonal shift can not only be a distraction, but it can also change how open and authentic we are with our friends (Markman, 2018). The reputation of the company you keep, the change of subordinate/managerial roles, and competition for future jobs can all be causes for friction among friends at work (Kirmayer, as cited in Vasel, 2018; Hakim, as cited in Vasel, 2018).

In sum, the research overwhelmingly supports workplace friendships as a positive interpersonal relationship at work. Having a friend at work can help with your job satisfaction and work performance. The key advice from the experts seems to be setting appropriate boundaries. Amy Cooper Hakim, an industrial-organizational psychology practitioner and workplace expert, says you don't always need to fully disclose to people at work (cited in Vasel, 2018). Instead, she encourages people to "be kind, professional and nice. But we don't need to tell every person at work our deep dark secrets, and long-term goals and dreams"

(Hakim as cited in Vasel, 2018).

Have you ever dated someone at work? Do you know if your company has a formal policy regarding romance in the workplace? If you have ever been exposed to workplace romance, whether knowing of one in your company or by engaging in a relationship with a co-worker yourself, you might already know that romantic relationships at work can be controversial. Romance between colleagues has been examined and debated by scholars and academics since the 1970s. In this section, we will take a quick look at romance in the workplace.

Romantic Relationships in the Workplace

Pierce and Aguinis (2001) define **workplace romances** as "mutually desired relationships involving sexual attraction between two employees of the same organization" (p. 206). (Please note that this does not include unwanted intimate interactions or sexual harassment of any kind; that will be covered later in this section.) Romantic relationships begin for much of the same reasons most interpersonal relationships begin: proximity, similarity, and physical attraction. A 2020 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that more than 50% of American workers report having had a crush on a co-worker. Almost 30% have had a workplace romance—and nearly the same amount report dating a boss or higher-up (Society for Human Resource Management, 2020). Therefore, we can deduce that workplace relationships are common; they are easy to access, and they happen both **laterally** (among colleagues) and **vertically** (subordinate to boss).

Though there is no consensus on why romantic relationships start, researchers have identified factors and progressions for how these relationships can evolve (Pierce & Aguinis, 2003). In their study of romantic workplace relationships, Pierce, Byrne, and Aguinis (1996) propose a model for understanding workplace relationships that begins with the physical closeness of two people; requires interpersonal and romantic attraction and a desire for a workplace relationship; and finally results in active engagement in that relationship. Workplace romances can progress and evolve like any other romantic relationship, with ups and downs, from emotional intimacy to casual hook-ups (Wilson, 2015). Interestingly, experts in the fields of Communication Studies, Psychology, Sociology, and Business have advocated against any kind of intimate relationship at work and also broadly encouraged sexuality and eroticism as natural components of workplace culture (Wilson, 2015).

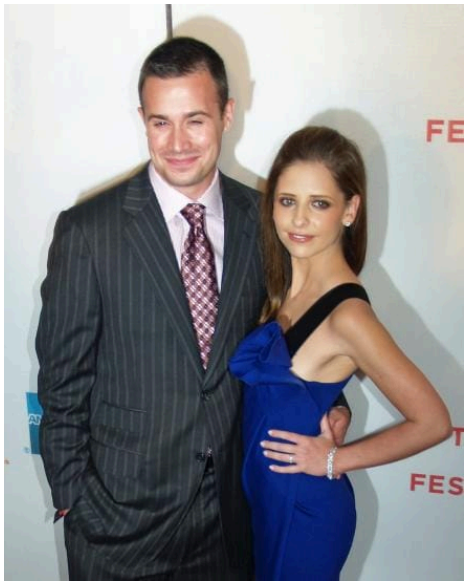


Figure 6.2.3: Actors Freddie Prinze Jr. and Sarah Michelle Gellar (pictured in 2007) first met on a film set, where their friendship gradually blossomed into romance. They later began dating and eventually married while collaborating on another film together. (CC BY-SA 3.0; David Shankbone via Wikimedia Commons)

Personal and Professional Ramifications

What may be of even more interest to those who have debated whether to engage in a workplace romance is the eventual outcome. To generalize some very complicated and intricate research, romantic relationships can foster two types of outcomes: personal and professional. Let's examine the positive side first. On the personal side, workplace romances can positively impact an employee's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation at work. Employees engaged in romantic workplace relationships will work longer hours so they can spend more time with their romantic partners (Romantic Relationships at Work,

2020). On the professional side, research by Robert Quinn (1977) cites job advancement, security, increased power, financial rewards, easier work, and job efficiency as possible professional benefits of a workplace relationship with someone of higher status, which makes workplace romance well worth the risk for some.



Figure 6.2.4: Two male colleagues working on computers side-by-side. (CC BY-SA 4.0 Tim van der Kuip via Unsplash)

However, as with any romantic relationship, the romance can dwindle or be terminated for a multitude of reasons, resulting in minor to significant impacts both personally and professionally. As you might have guessed, when a relationship sours in the workplace, one or both parties could see their career advancement stifled, experience less job security, and suffer a reduction in power at work (Romantic Relationships at Work, 2020). In addition, other interpersonal workplace relationships could be damaged by the romance. From disapproval and hostility for the romantic partners to the perception of favoritism (assumptions that there will be extra benefits or opportunities for the romantic partner over other employees), the reaction of co-workers can result in cynicism and hostility (Anderson & Fisher, 1991; Anderson & Hunsaker, 1985). Research also shows that after a failed workplace romance, there can be a decrease in job satisfaction, less organizational commitment, and lowered employee motivation (Romantic Relationships at Work, 2020). Swartz, Warfield, and Wood (1987) concluded that sex and work do not mix, arguing that workplace romances hurt both the parties involved as well as their co-workers and thus the organization at large.

Company Policies on Workplace Romance

As we mentioned at the start of this section, workplace romances are complicated, as well as being common and easily accessible. Rules on workplace romance are company-specific. Some employers ban interoffice dating altogether, while others allow dating so long as there is not a power dynamic at play, such as a manager dating a subordinate, for example (Noguchi, 2020). In addition, employees should be aware that even if their employer does not have a strict ban on co-worker romance, they still must follow general HR guidelines for the workspace. It is important to consider the threat of a perceived quid pro quo, where one employee asks for something in return for a favor. Mirande Valbrune, a Miami employment attorney, suggests always being explicit that it is safe for another to say “no” to any advances, like grabbing coffee or going out to dinner (Noguchi, 2020).

Moving forward, you need to understand your workplace policies on relationships between co-workers, set very clear boundaries with those with whom you work, and assess your risk/reward factor before engaging in any kind of romantic relationship at work.

Setting—and Crossing—Boundaries

Boundaries can be used as “gateways” into different domains of our lives (Matthews et al., 2010) that create “physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 474). That is, we create boundaries to funnel behaviors and/or actions that we allow in or not, based on the person, location, context, and more, in our relationships with others. Setting boundaries can be challenging, as boundaries are defined as “the never-ending, hands-on, largely visible process through which boundaries are negotiated, placed, maintained, and transformed by individuals over time” (Nippert-Eng, 1996, xiii), (Trefalt (2013) argues that boundaries are a fundamentally relational process and that you cannot neglect the relational context of boundaries,

as the past, consequences, and experiences of those involved must be factored into the equation. In this section, we will briefly cover examples where boundaries were crossed in the workplace.

Interpersonal relationships at work sometimes cross boundaries. We want to acknowledge that building mutual interpersonal relationships at your workplace does not include taking part in harassment of any kind, stereotyping others, or otherwise violating the explicit boundaries of others. We also would like to provide some context as to how common some harmful interpersonal communication exchanges are in our workspaces, hoping to shed light on how to spot and identify, and then, hopefully, eliminate them from your interpersonal exchanges (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021).

Harassment and Biases

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, mutual workplace relationships are common. However, there are instances when workplace relationships occur that are very much one-sided, unwelcome, and unwanted by the receiving party. Here, we will focus on interpersonal communication patterns of harassment and biases in the workplace.

How to Overcome Our Biases

To learn more about biases, check out diversity advocate Vernā Myers' TED Talk: *How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them.* You may also read the transcript. According to Myers, we can learn how to examine our subconscious attitudes toward out-groups and then move toward, not away from, those that make us feel uncomfortable.

It is helpful to understand the definitions of harassment and bias. For our purposes. **Harassment** is defined by Cornell Law School as offensive, unwelcome conduct based on the victim's protected characteristic that is so severe or pervasive that it affects the terms and conditions of the victim's employment. Harassment may take the form of words, actions, gestures, demands, or visual displays, such as photographs or cartoons. (Legal Information Institute, 2021, para. 1)

This can be present across interpersonal relationships at work. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2021), the harasser can be "the victim's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, an agent of the employer, a co-worker, or a non-employee," and "the victim does not have to be the person harassed but can be anyone affected by the offensive conduct" (para. 6).

Bias has more nuanced definitions: **explicit biases** are understood as overt prejudices and attitudes about a group, like racism or misogyny, while **unconscious** and **Implicit biases** are deeply held beliefs about others that may unconsciously drive attitudes and behavior (Rimnac, 2020). These exchanges can manifest in the form of verbal and nonverbal actions directed towards others (Bouckenooghe et al., 2015).

Harassment and biases can take many forms; in this section, we just scratch the surface of some of the most reported and researched facets of these areas.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2025) defines **sexual harassment** as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature, constitutes sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Given this definition, have you ever felt harassed at work? Did you say something? Did you ignore it? Did you make an official report?

In 2020, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 6,587 sexual harassment claims. Of those claims, 16.8% were made by men (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021). Research finds that men are the most common perpetrators of sexual harassment. Although men do harass other men, women are the most common targets (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). Further research reveals that Black women are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexual violence, more than any other group (Barlow, 2020; Shaw et al., 2018). Brassel (2020) found that this pattern may be caused by the masculine structures and hierarchy present in Western culture.

Sexual harassment causes problems within an organization by lowering the quality of the organizational lives of female employees

and creating obstacles that prevent employees from fully engaging with their organization (McDonald et al., 2011). Additionally, studies argue that sexual harassment creates professional, psychological, and physical health problems for those involved (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Statistics also suggest that "only a small number of those who experience harassment (one in ten) ever formally report"—and the most common reason for this silence is fear of retaliation (Shaw et al., 2018, p. 2).

Racial and Gender Biases



Figure 6.2.5: Two people of Asian descent working at their laptops. Depending on the environment, sometimes people of different ethnic backgrounds are targeted for their heritage. (CC0 1.0; by 玄史生 via Wikimedia Commons)

Although biases are not as obvious as harassment, we know that they are rampant across the workspace, from large to small organizations, from executives to entry-level employees, and in both private and public sectors (Bielby, 2000). Although biases can target any facet of another's identity, we will focus on **racial** and **gender bias**. Researchers have struggled to determine how harmful or costly biases are because they are hard to measure. Though some gender bias, like harassment, has been measured and studied, more subtle gender bias barriers, like the "glass cliff," when women are placed in positions of power while things are going poorly, other biases may not be recognized, obvious, or even called out (Stuart, 2018). We know from surveying the research that biases in the workplace impact the way we communicate with others.

In gender-bias research by Glass and Cook (2016), 97% of respondents said they worry about how they come off to others when exercising authority, 87% downplay their accomplishments to others, and 66% make less money than their male counterparts. Research has found that companies without women in top leadership roles can hurt their sales and profitability (Glass & Cook, 2016).

So how can we help combat interpersonal communication patterns of harassment and bias? First, we need to recognize them and acknowledge them in our place of work. Next, we can report them through the proper channels. Per most HR policy violations, sexual harassment can be reported by those who are not the victim of the harassment (EEOC, 2021). And lastly, we can help prevent or mitigate them from happening in the first place.

Self Awareness

An individual can become more self-aware of their own implicit biases through tools like the Harvard IATs. We can also sign up for and engage in professional development opportunities that talk about such matters. Many HR Departments offer some regular training on sexual harassment. And with implicit and unconscious bias gaining some traction, many organizations are bringing in guest speakers or even consultants to address common issues in our workplace.

Relationships Between Supervisors and Mentors in the Workplace



Figure 6.2.6: A supervisor and mentor high-five each other. A supportive workplace with morale among colleagues makes for upward mobility. (CC BY NC-ND 4.0; by krakenimages via Unsplash)

In addition to friendships and romantic relationships, we can also build relationships with mentors and/or supervisors. These workplace relationships can help us grow, achieve upward mobility, and provide us with some emotional support in our careers (University of California, Davis, 2019; Kram & Isabella, 1985). To frame and focus this section of our chapter, we will define mentors and supervisors as follows:

- A **mentor** is a more experienced colleague who provides guidance, knowledge, and support for the advancement of a less experienced colleague (Bauer, 1999).
- A **supervisor** is charged with managing others' performance, including conducting performance evaluations, while also serving as an educator, sponsor, coach, counselor, and director (UHR Employee Development, n.d.).

Let's begin by talking about why we would want to build interpersonal relationships with mentors and/or supervisors at work. First, we know that trust is important to creating and maintaining relationships. Studies show that organizations with trusting relationships between management and employees gain advantages that organizations without these relationships do not (Hosmer, 1995; Argyris, 1964). For example, in the restaurant industry, trust between supervisors and employees is related to success in sales, profits, and lower employee turnover (Davis et al., 2000). Furthermore, managers whose employees trust them were perceived more favorably in terms of their abilities, goodwill, and integrity (Davis et al., 2000). A supervisor can act as a mentor by providing both professional guidance and emotional support (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Though not all supervisors serve as mentors, Bell (1996) argues that when supervisors act as mentors, the beneficiaries include the mentor, mentee, and the organization itself.



Figure 6.2.7: A senior-level employee mentors a colleague who is a new hire. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Christina@wocintechchat.com M via Unsplash)

Why would someone want to engage in a mentoring relationship? According to Kathy Kram in her groundbreaking book *Mentoring at Work*, mentoring provides two basic functions for mentees: career and psychosocial. **Career functions** are what come to mind for most people when they think about mentoring, because career functions are associated with helping the mentee "learn the ropes" in an organization (or a field) to help the mentee climb the corporate ladder.

Mentors can engage in several different behaviors to help a mentee advance their career. For example, a mentor can coach the mentee; a mentor can sponsor the mentee's advancement by placing them on interesting and challenging projects; a mentor can help the mentee receive recognition and/or ensure the mentee is widely visible; and a mentor can provide the mentee with certain protections from organizational or field-based politics.

To explain how mentor–mentee relationships function from a communication perspective, Pamela Kalbfleisch developed the **mentoring enactment theory**. In Kalbfleisch's theory, the mentor–mentee relationship centers on two people who are joined together either formally or informally for the explicit purpose of achieving success. While mentees desire mentoring relationships because of the known value of mentoring on one's career trajectory, mentors experience inherent costs.

For mentors, there are costs associated with "loss of time spent coaching a protégé, vulnerability through sharing hard-earned techniques and secrets, and potentially developing difficulties in one's personal and professional life because of a relationship with a protégé" (Kalbfleisch, 2002, p. 64). So, why then do mentors opt to enter into mentoring relationships? Mentors have a variety of reasons depending on their own organizational and personal perceptions of mentoring itself. According to Kalbfleisch (2002), there are four common reasons why people decide to become a mentor: altruism, pay-it-forward, organizational expectations, or self-interest.

Why Mentor?

1. **Altruism**: The mentor may feel some kind of deeply held obligation to help others, so they seek out and enter into mentoring relationships out of a simple desire to see others grow.
2. **Pay-it-forward:** The notion of pay-it-forward is based on the idea that the mentor was at one point a mentee, and they feel a sense of obligation to their mentor. To pay this debt, they opt to take on mentees. In this sense, the mentor is paying it forward to a new generation of mentees.
3. **Organizational expectations:** Many organizations have formal mentoring requirements for individuals who reach a certain seniority stage. Often in these formal mentoring situations, the mentor may not have a choice of mentees. These mentoring relationships may not be the most effective because the mentor may feel strong-armed into the relationship.
4. **Self-interest**. Some mentors want a mentee for no other reason than they want someone who can help "accomplish outcomes or for an entourage to follow in one's wake" (Kalbfleisch, 2002, p. 64).

Key Takeaways

- Friendships, romances, and mentorships in the workplace provide belonging, support, and motivation. Research shows that friendships at work enhance job satisfaction, engagement, and even performance (Crabtree, 2004; King, 2020).
- However, these same relationships can create challenges—conflict, role changes, favoritism, or failed romances can negatively impact both personal well-being and organizational outcomes.
- Setting clear boundaries helps employees balance closeness with professionalism, protecting both individuals and organizations (Hakim, cited in Vasel, 2018; Matthews et al., 2010).
- Interpersonal communication is central to workplace dynamics, shaping friendships, mentorships, management relationships, and even romantic relationships within the broader field of Organizational Communication.
- Workplace friendships are strongly linked to higher job satisfaction, engagement, and performance, as positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors fulfill the human need to belong.

Attributions

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6.3: Culture in Interpersonal Communication

Culture and Context

In any major area of academic study, there are luminaries that one should understand. A luminary is an expert who sheds light on a subject and inspires and influences the work of others in that area. In this section, we will examine three important luminaries who have helped shape our understanding of culture and intercultural communication: Edward T. Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Stella Ting-Toomey.

Edward T. Hall

One of the earliest researchers in the area of cultural differences and their importance to communication was a researcher by the name of Edward T. Hall. His book Beyond Culture is still considered one of the most influential books in the field of intercultural communication. According to Hall, all cultures incorporate both verbal and nonverbal elements into communication. In his 1959 book, The Silent Language, Hall states, “culture is communication and communication is culture.” In the previous chapter, we talked about the importance of nonverbal communication. We also mentioned that nonverbal communication isn’t exactly universal. Some gestures can mean wildly different things in different parts of the world. President George H. Bush once held up his hand in a “V” for Victory salute to an Australian audience, only to find out later that this was the equivalent of the middle finger in the United States. President Nixon did the same thing, exiting an airplane in Brazil, flashing his famous OK sign with his thumb and forefinger forming a circle, but this is the “middle finger” in that culture. These two incidents have gone down in the annals of presidential history as cultural faux pas. Still, they illustrate the importance of knowing and understanding gestures in differing cultures because we do not all interpret nonverbal behavior the same way.

One of Hall's most essential contributions to the field of intercultural communication is the idea of low-context and high-context cultures. The terms **“low-context culture”** (LCC) and **“high-context culture”** (HCC) were created by Hall to describe how communication styles differ across cultures.

Characteristics of Low-Context Communication

Type: Explicit Communication

Focus: Verbal Communication

Context: Less Meaningful

Politeness: Not Important

Approach to People: Direct and Confrontational

In essence, “in LCC, meaning is expressed through explicit verbal messages, both written and oral. In HCC, on the other hand, intention or meaning can best be conveyed through implicit contexts, including gestures, social customs, silence, nuance, or tone of voice.”

Characteristics of High-Context Communication

Type: Implicit Communication

Focus: Nonverbal Communication

Context: Very Meaningful

Politeness: Very Important

Approach to People: Indirect and Polite

You may be wondering, by this point, how low-context and high-context cultures differ across different countries. Though the pattern is not cut and dry, many European countries, as well as the United States, have low-context cultures. By contrast, countries in the Middle East, East Asia, and parts of South America have higher-context cultures. Figure 6.3.1 illustrates some of these patterns of context that exist in today's world.

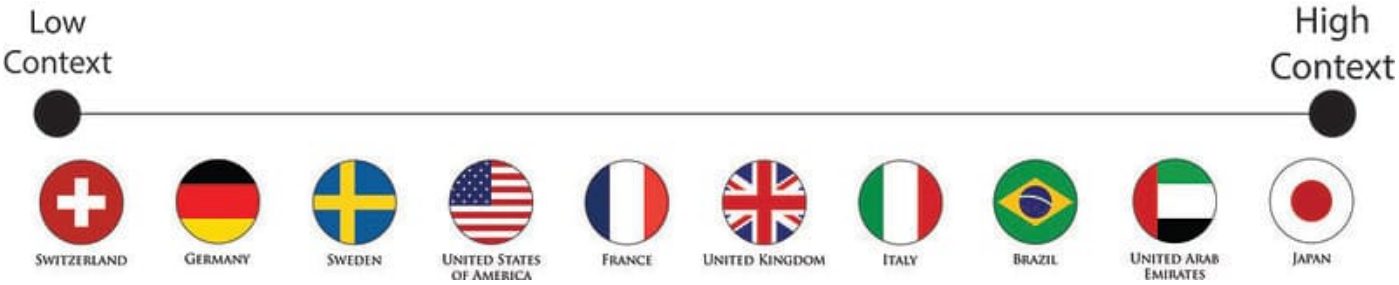


Figure 6.3.1: Low and High-Context Nations. A graphic showing the flags of different nations ranked in order of whether they are high-context or low-context communicators.

Geert Hofstede

Another very important researcher in the area of culture is a man by the name of Geert Hofstede. Starting in the 1970s, Geert became interested in how people from different cultures approach work. His interests ultimately culminated in his 1980 publication *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values,* where he explained some basic cultural differences. Over the years, Geert has fine-tuned his theory of culture, and the most recent update to his theory occurred in 2010. In Geert's research examining thousands of workers from around the globe, he has noticed a series of six cultural differences: low vs. high power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, low vs. high uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint. Let's briefly look at each of these.

Low vs. High Power Distance

The first of Geert Hofstede's original dimensions of national cultures was **power distance,** or the degree to which those people and organizations with less power within a culture accept and expect that power is unequally distributed within their culture. To determine power differences within a culture, Hofstede originally was able to examine cultural value survey data that had been collected by IBM. Over the years, Hofstede and his fellow researchers have regularly collected additional data from around the world to make his conceptualization of six cultural differences one of the most widely studied concepts of culture. When it comes to power distances, these differences often manifest themselves in many ways within a singular culture: class, education, occupations, and health care. With class, many cultures have three clear segments: low, middle, and upper. However, the concepts of what is low, middle, and upper can have very large differences. For example, the median income for the average U.S. household is $51,100. When discussing household incomes, we use the median (middlemost number) because it's the most accurate representation of income. According to a 2013 report from the U.S. Census Bureau (using income data from 2012), here is how income inequality in the U.S. looks:

> Households in the lowest quintile had incomes of $20,599 or less in 2012. Households in the second quintile had incomes between $20,600 and $39,764, those in the third quintile had incomes between $39,765 and $64,582, and those in the fourth quintile had incomes between $64,583 and $104,096. Households in the highest quintile had incomes of $104,097 or more. The top 5 percent had incomes of $191,157 or more.

However, income is just one indicator of power distance within a culture. Others are who gets educated and what type of education they receive, who gets health care and what type, and what types of occupations do those with power have versus those who do not have power. According to Hofstede's most recent data, the five countries with the highest power distances are: Malaysia, Slovakia, Guatemala, Panama, and the Philippines. The five countries with the lowest power distances are Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, and Switzerland (German-speaking part). Notice that the U.S. does not make it into the top five or the bottom five. According to Hofstede's data, the U.S. is 16th from the bottom in terms of power distance, so we are in the bottom third in terms of power distance. When it comes down to it, despite the issues we have in our country, the power disparity is not nearly as significant as it is in many other parts of our world.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

The United States is number one in **individualism**, according to Hofstede's data. Americans are considered individualistic. In other words, we think about ourselves as individuals rather than as a collective group. Most Asian countries are considered collectivistic cultures because these cultures tend to be group-focused. **Collectivistic cultures** tend to think about actions that might affect the entire group rather than specific members of the group.



Figure 6.3.2: Women stand together to celebrate the achievements of their scholars at a ceremony held in Lahore, Pakistan. Pakistan has a strongly collectivist culture. (CC0 1.0; USAID Pakistan via Wikimedia Commons)

In an **individualistic culture,** there is a belief that you can do what you want and follow your passions. In an individualistic culture, if someone asked what you do for a living, they would answer by saying their profession or occupation. However, in collectivistic cultures, a person would answer in terms of the group, organization, and/or corporation that they serve. Moreover, in a collectivistic culture, there is a belief that you should do what benefits the group. In other words, collectivistic cultures focus on how the group can grow and be productive.



Figure 6.3.3: Former No. 1 German female tennis player Steffi Graf, smiling on court. Germany is considered an Individualistic country where individualized sports, in particular, such as tennis, thrive. (CC BY 2.0; Chris Eason via Wikimedia Commons)

Masculinity vs. Femininity

The notions of masculinity and femininity are often misconstrued to be tied to their biological sex counterparts, female and male. For understanding culture, Hofstede acknowledges that this distinction ultimately has a lot to do with work goals. On the masculine end of the spectrum, individuals tend to be focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge. Hofstede also refers to these tendencies as being more assertive. Femininity, on the other hand, involves characteristics like having a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with people at work, and security (both job and familial). Hofstede refers to this as being more relationally oriented. Admittedly, in Hofstede's research, there does tend to be a difference between females and males on these characteristics (females tend to be more relationally oriented and males more assertive), which is why Hofstede went with the terms masculinity and femininity in the first place. Ultimately, we can define these types of cultures in the following way:

> A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life.
>
> A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life [emphasis in original].

The top five most masculine countries are Slovakia, Japan, Hungary, Austria, and Venezuela (the U.S. is number 19 out of 76), whereas feminine countries are represented by Sweden, Norway, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Denmark. As you can imagine, depending on the type of culture you live in, you will have wildly different social interactions with other people. There's also a massive difference in the approach to marriage. In masculine cultures, women are the caretakers of the home, while men are expected to be healthy and wealthy. As such, women are placed in a subservient position to their husbands, who are often identified socially by their husbands. For example, an invitation to a party would be addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith." In feminine cultures, men and women are held to the same standards, and their relationships should be based on mutual friendship.

Low vs. High Uncertainty Avoidance

The next category identified by Hofstede involves the concept of uncertainty avoidance. Life is full of uncertainty. We cannot escape it; however, some people are more prone to becoming fearful in situations that are ambiguous or unknown. **Uncertainty avoidance** then involves the extent to which cultures as a whole are fearful of ambiguous and unknown situations. People in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance can view this ambiguity and lack of knowledge as threatening, which is one reason why people in these cultures tend to have higher levels of anxiety and neuroticism as a whole. In fact, within the latest edition of the book examining these characteristics, Hofstede and his colleagues title the chapter on uncertainty avoidance as "What is Different is Dangerous," calling out the threat factor that people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures feel. Cultures at the high end of uncertainty avoidance include Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Uruguay, and Flemish Belgium, whereas cultures at the low end of uncertainty avoidance include Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark, Sweden, and Hong Kong. The United States ranks 64th out of 76 countries analyzed (Singapore was number 76). From an interpersonal perspective, people from high uncertainty-avoidant cultures are going to have a lot more anxiety associated with interactions involving people from other cultures. Furthermore, there tend to be higher levels of prejudice and higher levels of ideological, political, and religious fundamentalism, which do not allow for any kind of debate.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

In addition to the previous characteristics, Hofstede noticed a fifth characteristic of cultures that he termed long-term and short-term orientation. Long-term orientation focuses on the future and not the present or the past. As such, there is a focus on both persistence and thrift. The emphasis on endurance is vital because being persistent today will help you in the future. The goal is to work hard now, so you can have the payoff later. The same is true of thrift. We want to conserve our resources and underspend to build that financial cushion for the future. Short-term-oriented cultures, on the other hand, tend to focus on both the past and the present. In these cultures, there tends to be high respect for the past and the various traditions that have made that culture great. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on "saving face," which we will discuss more in the next section, fulfilling one's obligations today, and enjoying one's leisure time. At the long-term end of the spectrum are countries like China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan; whereas countries like Pakistan, the Czech Republic, Nigeria, Spain, and the Philippines are examples of short-term. The United States ranked 31 out of 39, with Pakistan being number 39. Interpersonally, long-term-oriented countries were more satisfied with their contributions to "Being attentive to daily human relations, deepening human bonds in family, neighborhood, and friends or acquaintances" when compared to their short-term counterparts.

Indulgence vs. Restraint

The final characteristic of cultures is a new one first reported on in the 2010 edition of *Cultures and Organizations*. The sixth cultural characteristic is called indulgence vs. restraint, which examines issues of happiness and well-being. According to Hofstede and his coauthors, "Indulgence stands for a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Its opposite pole, restraint, reflects a conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms." The top five on the Indulgence end are Venezuela, Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, and Nigeria, whereas those on the restraint end are Pakistan, Egypt, Latvia, Ukraine, and Albania. The U.S. is towards the indulgence end of the spectrum and ranks at #15 along with Canada and the Netherlands. Some interesting findings associated with indulgence include experiencing higher levels of positive emotions and remembering those emotions for more extended periods. Furthermore, individuals from more indulgent cultures tend to be more optimistic, while their restrained counterparts tend to be more cynical. People in more indulgent countries are going to be happier than their restrained counterparts, and people within indulgent cultures show lower rates of cardiovascular problems commonly associated with stress. Finally, individuals from indulgent cultures tend to be more extroverted and outgoing as a whole, whereas individuals from restrained cultures tend to be more neurotic or emotionally reactive. From years of research examining both extraversion and neuroticism, we know that extraverted individuals have more successful interpersonal relationships than those who are highly neurotic or emotionally reactive. Ultimately, research examining these differences has shown that people from indulgent countries are more open to other cultures, more satisfied with their lives, and are more likely to communicate with friends and family members via the Internet while interacting with more people from other cultures via the Internet as well.

Think About This 6.3.1 Which Countries Openly Show Their Affection?

In 2017, Daniel H. Mansson and Aldís G. Sigurðardóttir set out to examine the concept of trait affection in Hofstede's theoretical framework. "**Affectionate communication"** is conceptualized as "a person's use of intentional and overt communicative behaviors to convey feelings of closeness, care, and fondness in the form of verbal statements, nonverbal behaviors, and social support."

For this study, the researchers studied 606 participants in four different countries: Denmark, Iceland, Poland, and the United States.

When it came to trait affection given, the United States participants reported giving more affection than any of the three other countries. The other countries did not differ from each other in the trait of affection given.

When it came to trait affection received, all four groups differed from one another. The order of affection received was (in order of the most affectionate trait affection received): United States, Denmark, Poland, and Iceland.

Finally, the researchers examined affection given and received about Hofstede's work. "The results also indicated that trait affection given was significantly associated with the individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty avoidance dimensions of cultures. Similarly, trait affection received was significantly associated with the individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions of cultures."

Mansson, D. H., & Sigurðardóttir, A. G. (2017). Trait affection given and received: A test of Hofstede's theoretical framework. Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 46(2), 161-172. Hofstede's Theoretical Framework.

Stella Ting-Toomey

In 1988, intercultural communication researcher Stella Ting-Toomey developed face-negotiation theory to help explain the importance of face within interpersonal interactions. The basic idea behind face-negotiation theory is that face-saving, conflict, and culture are all intertwined. In the most recent version of her theory, Stella Ting-Toomey outlines seven basic factors of face-negotiation theory:

Face-Negotiation Theory

1. People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations.

2. The concept of face is especially problematic in emotionally vulnerable situations (such as embarrassment, requests, or conflict situations) when the situational identities of the communicators are called into question.
3. The cultural variability dimensions of individualism-collectivism and small/large power distance shape the orientations, movements, contents, and styles of facework.
4. Individualism-collectivism shapes members' preferences for self-oriented facework versus other-oriented facework.
5. Small/large power distance shapes members' preferences for horizontal-based facework versus vertical-based facework.
6. The cultural variability dimensions, in conjunction with individual, relational, and situational factors, influence the use of particular facework behaviors in particular cultural scenes.
7. Intercultural facework competence refers to the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively.

First and foremost, communication and face are highly intertwined concepts, so when coming to an intercultural encounter, it is important to remember the interrelationship between the two. As far as Ting-Toomey's theory goes, she takes this idea one step further to understand how face and communication ultimately enable successful intercultural conflict management. Face-negotiation theory is ultimately concerned with three different types of face: self-face (concern for our face), other-face (concern for another person's face), and mutual-face (concern for both interactants and the relationship). As you can see from Ting-Toomey's last assumption in her theory above, individuals who are competent in face work can recognize when face work is necessary and then handle those situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively. As such, face work should be viewed as a necessary component for understanding any form of interpersonal interaction, but it is especially important when examining interpersonal interactions that occur between people from differing cultural backgrounds.

Think About This 6.3.2 What is Face?

The concept of **face** is not the easiest to define nor completely understand. Originally, the concept of face is not a Western concept, even though the idea of "saving face" is pretty common in everyday talk today. According to Hsien Chin Hu, the concept of face stems from two distinct Chinese words, *lien and mien-tzu*. *Lien* "represents the confidence of society in the integrity of the ego's moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. Lien is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction." On the other hand, *mien-tzu* stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [America]: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation." However, David Yau-fai Ho argues that face is more complicated than just lien and mien-tzu, so he provided the following definition:

> Face is the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations that others have placed upon him. In terms of two interacting parties, face is the reciprocated compliance, respect, and/or deference that each party expects from and extends to the other party.

More simplistically, face is essential, "a person's reputation and feelings of prestige within multiple spheres, including the workplace, the family, personal friends, and society at large." For our purposes, we can generally break face down into general categories: face gaining and face losing. Face gaining refers to the strategies a person might use to build their reputation and feelings of prestige (e.g., talking about accomplishments, active social media presence), whereas face losing refers to those behaviors someone engages in that can harm their reputation or feelings of prestige (e.g., getting caught in a lie, failing.

Improving Intercultural Communication Skills

One of the latest buzzwords in the business world is **"cultural intelligence,"** which was initially introduced to the scholarly community in 2003 by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang. In the past decade, a wealth of research has examined the importance of cultural intelligence in interpersonal interactions with people from other cultures. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is defined as an "individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity."

Four Factors of Cultural Intelligence

In their original study on the topic, Earley and Ang argued that cultural intelligence comprises four distinct dimensions: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral. In our globally connected world, cultural intelligence is a vital skill to have.

So, how culturally intelligent are you? Take a minute to complete the Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire below:

1. When I am interacting with someone from a different culture, I know when I use my knowledge of that person's culture during our interaction.
2. When I interact with someone from a culture I know nothing about, I have no problem adjusting my perspective of that culture while we talk.
3. During intercultural interactions, I am well aware of the cultural knowledge I utilize.
4. I always check my knowledge of someone from another culture to ensure that my understanding of their culture is accurate.
5. During my intercultural interactions, I try to be mindful of how my perceptions of someone's culture are either consistent with or differ from reality.
6. I pride myself on knowing a lot about other people's cultures.
7. I understand the social, economic, and political systems of other cultures.
8. I know about other cultures' religious beliefs and values.
9. I understand how daily life is enacted in other cultures.
10. I know the importance of paintings, literature, and other forms of art in other cultures.
11. I enjoy reaching out and engaging in an intercultural encounter.
12. I would have no problem socializing with people from a new culture.
13. Although intercultural encounters often involve stress, I don't mind the stress because meeting people from other cultures makes it worthwhile.
14. I would have no problems accustoming myself to the routines of another culture.
15. I enjoy being with people from other cultures and getting to know them.
16. I know how to interact verbally with people from different cultures.
17. I know how to interact non-verbally with people from different cultures.
18. I can vary my rate of speech if an intercultural encounter requires it.
19. I can easily alter my behaviors to suit the needs of an intercultural encounter.
20. I can alter my facial expressions if an intercultural exchange requires it.

To compute your scores, follow the instructions below:

- Add items 1–5: Intercultural understanding.
- Add items 6–10: Intercultural knowledge.
- Add items 11–15: Intercultural motivation.
- Add items 16–20: Intercultural behavior.

Interpretation

Scores for each of the four factors (intercultural understanding, intercultural knowledge, intercultural motivation, and intercultural behavior) can be added together to get a composite score. Each of the four factors exists on a continuum from 5 (not culturally intelligent) to 25 (highly culturally intelligent). An average person would score between 12 and 18.

Cognitive CQ

First, **cognitive CQ** involves knowing about different cultures (intercultural knowledge). Many types of knowledge about a culture can be relevant during an intercultural interaction: rules and norms, economic and legal systems, cultural values and beliefs, the importance of art within a society, etc. All of these different areas of knowledge involve facts that can help you understand people from different cultures. For example, in most of the United States, when you are talking to someone, eye contact is very important. You may have even been told by someone to “look at me when I’m talking to you” if you’ve ever gotten in trouble. However, this isn’t consistent across different cultures at all. Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures often view direct contact when talking to someone superior as a sign of disrespect. Knowing how eye contact functions across cultures can help you know more about how to interact with people from various cultures. Probably one of the best books you can read to know more about how to communicate in another culture is Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway’s book *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More than 60 Countries* [42]

Motivational CQ

Second, we have **motivational CQ**, or the degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to different cultural environments. Motivation is the key to effective intercultural interactions. You can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you are not motivated to have successful intercultural interactions, you will not have them.

Metacognitive CQ

Third, **metacognitive CQ** involves being consciously aware of your intercultural interactions in a manner that helps you have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures (intercultural understanding). All of the knowledge about cultural differences in the world will not be beneficial if you cannot use that information to understand and adapt your behavior during an interpersonal interaction with someone from a different culture. As such, we must always be learning about cultures, but also be ready to adjust our knowledge about people and their cultures through our interactions with them.

Behavioral CQ

Lastly, **behavioral CQ** is the next step following metacognitive CQ, which involves behaving in a manner consistent with what you know about other cultures. We should never expect others to adjust to us culturally. Instead, culturally intelligent people realize that it's best to adapt their behaviors (verbally and nonverbally) to bridge the cultural gap between people. When we go out of our way to be culturally intelligent, we will encourage others to do so as well. As you can see, becoming a truly culturally intelligent person involves a lot of work. As such, it's important to spend time and build your cultural intelligence if you are going to be an effective communicator in today's world.

Engaging Culturally Mindful Interactions

Admittedly, being culturally competent takes a lot of work and a lot of practice. Even if you're not completely culturally competent, you can engage with people from other cultures mindfully.

First, when it comes to engaging with people from other cultures, we need to be fully in the moment and not think about previous interactions with people from a culture or possible future interactions with people from a culture. Instead, it's essential to focus on the person you are interacting with. You also need to be aware of your stereotypes and prejudices that you may have about others. people from a different culture. Don't try to find evidence to support or negate these stereotypes or prejudices. If you focus on evidence-finding, you're just trying to satisfy your thoughts and feelings and not mindfully engaging with this other person. Also, if you find that your mind is shifting, recognize the shift and allow yourself to re-center on your interaction with the other person.

Second, go into an intercultural interaction knowing your intention. If your goal is to learn more about that person's culture, that's a great intention. However, that may not be the only intention we have when interacting with someone from another culture. For example, you may be interacting with someone from another culture because you're trying to sell them a product you represent. If your main intention is sales, then be aware of your intention and don't try to deceive yourself into thinking it's something more altruistic.

Lastly, go into all intercultural interactions with the right attitude. Remember, the goal of being mindful is to be open, kind, and curious. Although we often discuss mindfulness in terms of how we can be open, kind, and curious with ourselves, it's also important to extend that same framework when we are interacting with people from other cultures. So much of a mindful relationship is embodying the right attitude during our interactions with others. If you need a refresher on building the right attitude during your interactions, go back and look at Daniel Siegel's COAL and Jon Kabat-Zinn's Seven Attitudes for Mindfulness discussed in Chapter 1.

Overall, the goal of mindful intercultural interactions is to be present in the moment in a nonjudgmental way. When you face judgments, recognize them and ask yourself where they have come from. Interrogate those judgments. At the same time, don't judge yourself for having these ideas. If we have stereotypes about a specific culture, it's important to recognize those stereotypes, call them out, understand where they came from in the first place, and examine them for factual accuracy.

For example, imagine you're talking to someone from the Republic of Kiribati. Chances are, you've probably never heard of the Republic of Kiribati, but it's a real country in Oceania. But let's say all you know about the people from the Republic of Kiribati is that they like European-style football. During your interaction, you say, "So, what's your favorite football team?" In this moment,

you've taken the one stereotype you had and used it to help engage in an interaction. However, if the person comes back and says, "I don't care. Sports just aren't my thing." How do you respond? First, recognize that you attempted to use a stereotype that you had and call it out for what it was. That doesn't make you a bad person, but we must learn from these encounters and broaden our worldviews. Second, call out the stereotype in your mind. Before that moment, you may not have even realized that you had a stereotype of people from the Republic of Kiribati. Labeling our stereotypes of other people is important because it helps us recognize them faster, the more we engage in this type of mindful behavior. Third, figure out where that stereotype came from. Maybe you had been in New Zealand and saw a match on television, and saw the Kiribati national football team. In that one moment, you learned a tiny bit about an entire country and pocketed it away for future use. Sometimes it's easy to figure out where our stereotypes evolved from, but sometimes these stereotypes are so ingrained in us through our own culture that it's hard to figure out their origin. Lastly, it's time to realize that your stereotype may not be that factual. At the same time, you may have found the one resident of the Republic of Kiribati who doesn't like football. We can often make these determinations by talking to the other person.

At the same time, it's also important. Source: to be mindfully open to the other person's stereotypes of people within your own culture. For example, someone from the Republic of Kiribati may have a stereotype that Americans know nothing about football (other than American football). If you're a fan of what we in the U.S. call soccer, then you correct that stereotype or at least provide that person a more nuanced understanding of your own culture. Sure, American football still is the king of sports in the U.S., but media trends for watching football (soccer) are growing, and more and more Americans are becoming fans.

Key Takeaways

- Low-context cultures are cultures where the emphasis is placed on the words that come out of an individual's mouth. High-context cultures, on the other hand, are cultures where understanding a message is dependent on the cultural context and a communicator's nonverbal behavior.
- Geert Hofstede's research created a taxonomy for understanding and differentiating cultures. Geert's taxonomy was originally based on data collected by IBM, and he found that cultures could be differentiated by power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint.
- Face is the standing or position a person has in the eyes of others. During an interpersonal interaction, individuals strive to create a positive version of their face for the other person.
- Cultural intelligence involves the degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations. Cultural intelligence consists of four distinct parts: knowledge, motivation, understanding, and behavior.
- Having strong intercultural relationships can be very rewarding. When thinking about your intercultural relationships, some ways to have more rewarding intercultural relationships can include: understanding your own culture better, being interested in other people and their cultures, respecting other people's cultures, becoming culturally intelligent, tolerating ambiguity during interactions, being aware of and overcoming your ethnocentrism, and being a good example of your own culture.

Attributions

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6.4: The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication

Relationship Check

Samantha and Alex have been dating for about a year. Samantha feels uncertain about Alex's long-term commitment but doesn't feel comfortable asking him directly. Instead, she begins to gauge the state of the relationship. Samantha deliberately "forgets" to respond to Alex's texts for two days, curious to see if he'll get worried or lose interest. When Alex doesn't reach out much, she grows insecure. Instead of talking about it, Samantha then flirts lightly with a coworker in front of Alex at a party, watching closely for his reaction. Alex notices and grows suspicious, but instead of feeling reassured, he begins to doubt Samantha's loyalty.



Figure 6.4.1: A couple discusses their relationship during a private moment in a park. (CC BY 2.0 Pedro Ribeiro Simoes via Wikimedia Commons)

The above scenario is one example of how relationships can be tested when people succumb to the "dark side" of communication.

'Dark Side' Behaviors in Communication

Some types of communication that are considered to be on the "dark side" are:

- Verbal Aggression: The use of words to hurt others.
- Deception: Lies told with malicious intent.
- Psychological Abuse: A type of domestic violence that can consist of psychological aggression.
- Bullying: A form of communication in which an aggressive individual targets an individual who is perceived to be weaker.
- Infidelity: Disloyalty or unfaithfulness to someone. Infidelity can be emotional as well as physical.

For many years, communication scholars failed to focus on the more negative aspects of communication, thereby overlooking opportunities to develop solutions for those on the receiving end and for those who are the source. This section of the chapter will explore destructive behaviors in relationships and negative communication strategies. Awareness of these negative communication strategies may be the first step in preventing them.

Secret Testing

Very often, in relationships, individuals seek to understand the nature or state of their relationship. The most direct way to understand a relationship is to talk about it, but sometimes the timing doesn't seem right. Perhaps it's too soon, or maybe the

relational partner is squeamish about talking. Regardless, individuals experience a great deal of uncertainty about the nature of the relationship. Uncertainty also exists when relationships seem to be headed toward termination.

Humans engage in intrapersonal communication in which we think about how our dating partner feels about us or about whether the individual wishes to continue in the relationship. A great deal of time may be spent thinking about how the partner feels. If you have ever called a friend to ask your friend's opinion about how your boyfriend or girlfriend feels about you, then you are engaging in information seeking about your relationship. In the early stages of relationships, the relational partners may not share the same definition of the relationship. As a result, one or both relational partners experience uncertainty. Research demonstrates that individuals experiencing uncertainty will work to reduce uncertainty. As research continued, it was determined that it is taboo to talk directly with a relationship partner about the state of the relationship. Consider your own experiences with dating and whether it is comfortable to ask or be asked, "So, where are we? Are we dating exclusively, seeing other people...?" Because of the discomfort of such direct questions, individuals tend to use indirect strategies.

There are seven indirect strategies individuals use to assess the state of their relationship. These indirect strategies are referred to as **secret tests**. Some secret tests invoke negative relational strategies such as provoking jealousy, deliberately behaving negatively toward a partner, being overly demanding, intentionally creating distance, and testing a partner through a third-party "fidelity check." Many secret tests may result in relational hurt or even relationship termination.

Secret tests are labeled directness, endurance, indirect suggestions, public presentation, separation, third party, and the triangle test.

Directness Test

Directness is the least secretive of the strategies and involves asking the relational partner about his/her feelings toward the relationship and commitment to the relationship. Alternatively, an individual might disclose their feelings about the relationship with the hope that the relationship partner will reciprocate. Although this "test" may not feel comfortable at first, it can have positive outcomes and involves open communication. Though employing this test may lead to answers that one may not want to hear, at least information is obtained directly from the relationship partner. Research conducted by Melanie Booth-Butterfield and Rebecca Chory-Assad (Chory-Assad & Booth-Butterfield, 2001)indicates that individuals in more stable relationships are more likely to use this overt strategy.

Endurance Test

An **endurance test** is another form of secret testing in which the partner is tested by engaging in actions that the partner might perceive as a cost in the relationship. If the partner remains in the relationship, then it is presumed that the partner is committed to the relationship. Research revealed three types of endurance tests: behaving negatively toward the partner, criticizing oneself to the point of being annoying, and making a request that required the partner to exert a great deal of effort. Because the endurance test involves introducing cost into the relationship, individuals risk tipping the scales, i.e., creating more costs than rewards, which social exchange theory tells us may result in relationship dissolution. Melanie Booth-Butterfield and Rebecca Chory-Assad explored secret test use in deteriorating relationships. Their research revealed that in unstable relationships, any secret test involving behaviors that deviated from what one would normally do in a relationship was associated with a desire for relationship disengagement.

Indirect Suggestions Test

The third form of secret testing is **Indirect suggestions**. Indirect suggestions involve joking or hinting about more serious stages of relationships, such as marriage or having children. If joking about more serious stages in a relationship is met with laughter, flirting, or intimate touching, then it might be assumed that the partner is interested in pursuing a more serious relationship.

Presenting the Relationship to Outsiders Test

The fourth form of secret testing involves **presenting the relationship to outsiders** as a relationship in which a mutual commitment is involved. This public presentation is meant to gauge the partner's response. For example, you might change your Facebook status to "in a relationship" to gauge your partner's reaction. Another example is introducing your relationship partner as girlfriend/boyfriend and observing the reaction. This secret test is particularly risky because it may result in a public rejection. The advantage is that it might result in public acceptance.

Separation Test

A fifth secret test is the **separation test**. Have you ever been in the beginning stages of a relationship and found it necessary to travel, and hoped that your new relationship would survive the physical distance? At times, individuals intentionally create physical distance to test the strength of the relationship. If the relationship survives a few days of separation, then this is an affirmation that the partner is committed. If the relationship partner does not attempt to make contact during the physical separation, then this may be a sign that there is a less-than-desirable level of interest.

Third-Party Test

The sixth form of secret testing is **third-party testing**. In this case, one might seek the opinion or insight from the partner's friends, family members, or coworkers.

Triangle Test

The final form of secret testing is the **triangle test**. This test: For example, a relationship partner might be told that a classmate was making flirtatious advances in class. The partner's reaction to this information is presumed to be an indicator of the partner's commitment. A "fidelity check" is another form of triangle testing in which a situation is created to allow the partner to "cheat." The partner's reaction is then observed.

In more recent research, Rebecca Chory-Assad and Melanie Booth-Butterfield determined that relationship partners use different strategies when attempting to maintain a relationship than when attempting to end a relationship.[6] These researchers determined that relationship partners who wish to maintain a relationship when the relationship seems to be coming to an end will use the direct secret test in which the partner is approached directly. On the other hand, individuals who wish to end a relationship will do so by utilizing a secret test, such as jealousy. Still, these individuals also report having low self-esteem. They concluded that individuals with low self-esteem might use secret testing as a means to "break up" because they do not have the confidence to talk with their partner directly.

Empty Apologies

Apologies are a necessary part of everyday interactions and are important to correcting either intentional or unintentional hurt created in others. Despite the positive aspect of apologizing, it is often difficult to do. If your parents/guardians ever required you to apologize to a sibling, then you may recall the difficulty of uttering the words, "I apologize." Conversely, some individuals use apologies so frequently that the apology becomes meaningless. An apology implies acknowledgment of wrongdoing.

Acknowledgment includes expression of responsibility, conveyance of remorse, and direct request for forgiveness. Acknowledgment of wrongdoing should imply that there will be an effort to avoid repeated occurrences of the same behavior. Regardless of the difficulties presented by the need to apologize, the positive aspects must be considered. Apologies have positive benefits, such as increased feelings of empathy for the offender and reduced consequences for the offender. Individuals who offer more elaborate apologies receive more favorable evaluations, are blamed less, forgiven more, and liked more by the individuals to whom an apology is made. *Apology Sincerity* influences how the victim feels after the negative event. Apology sincerity may alleviate strong negative emotions, including anger. Sincere apologies may also lead victims to think about conflict less negatively and be less vengeful.

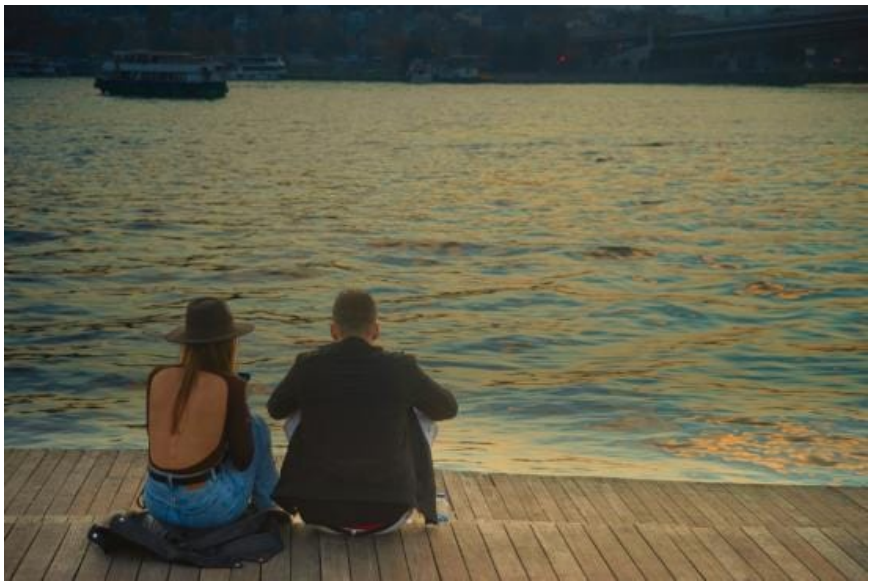


Figure 6.4.2: A couple, dealing with infidelity issues, tries to apologize to begin repairing the relationship. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Dolores Carrington via Wikimedia Commons)

Internet Infidelity

The amount of time spent online by a wide range of people makes the Internet an adequate "meeting place" for relationships of all types. The Internet shrinks our world and enables individuals to find others with similar interests, desirable knowledge (health information, how to clean, the best campgrounds, etc.), and attractive qualities. We might consider that the Internet provides privacy, the ability to interact frequently, and enables proximity. Research shows that when it comes to Internet infidelity, partners perceive their infidelity to be more acceptable than their partner's infidelity. Also, males find involvement/goal-directed acts (making plans, expressing love) more acceptable than women. Because of the murky nature of what constitutes infidelity via the Internet, researchers have worked to define it accurately. **Internet infidelity** is defined as using "sexual energy of any sort—thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship, and then pretending that this drain in energy will affect neither partner nor the relationship as long as it remains undiscovered." Partners take a harsher approach to Internet infidelity with their partners than with themselves. Specifically, the researchers concluded that there is a double standard in Internet infidelity. Individuals find the Internet infidelity of their partner to be worse than their own Internet infidelity. Also, relational partners use self-motivated rules regarding Internet infidelity and have different expectations for themselves than for their relationship partner. Internet infidelity led to the murder of Google executive Forrest Hayes, who was described as a loving father and husband. Hayes made an unfortunate decision to make contact with Alix Tichelman on SeekingArrangement.com. After meeting with Tichelman several times, she injected him with an overdose of heroin, and he was found dead on his yacht in Santa Cruz's Craft Harbor the next day. According to the Washington Post, the woman coldly injected him with heroin and simply walked away. Her actions were caught on camera, and she is now on trial for them.

Internet Characteristics Fostering Online Infidelity

Contributing to the ease of forming relationships via the Internet are several characteristics identified through research. First, the Internet increases the speed at which messages are sent. Consider the difference in sending messages today in comparison to the early 1990s. Mail and landline phones were the primary means of communicating "quickly." Widespread use of emails and instant messaging increased the speed with which people could communicate. Reach is another characteristic of the Internet, which enables individuals to establish many more relationships than in the past. Relationships were previously established by those in our immediate vicinity, including our hometown, workplace, places for social gatherings, and churches. Now, our computer/smartphone puts us in touch with people all over the world without ever leaving our home. Anonymity (revelation of identity or lack thereof) also opens up opportunities for relationships. Consider the case of Manti Te'o, in which anonymity allowed him to be fooled into believing that he had a girlfriend and that she died as a result of leukemia.

Finally, interactivity, defined as the ability to send and receive messages and react to these messages, makes the Internet a

breeding ground for infidelity. An additional characteristic of the Internet that may deceive individuals into thinking that they are not engaged in infidelity is the lack of physical presence, which makes the issue of infidelity ambiguous. After all, if one is not physically present, how can one cheat?

Think About This 6.4.1 Cheating Online, Internet Infidelity

Tony Docan-Morgan and Carol A. Docan set out to examine how men and women view Internet infidelity in a 2007 study. The researchers started by having 43 undergraduates list what they thought could be Internet infidelity. The researchers reviewed the open-ended responses and pared down the list to the following:

- having cybersex (engaging in sexually explicit conversations with someone online)
- flirtatious behavior (flirting with someone they met online)
- emotional (developing an emotional connection with someone online)
- seeking another (posting a personal ad online)
- conversing with another (having a conversation with someone online)
- exchanging information (giving personal information about yourself online – e.g., email address, cellphone number)
- other (engaging in casual conversational topics, not relational or emotional ones)

Based on these six categories and other literature on the subject, the researchers developed a measure and narrowed it down to 27 items. The measure ultimately discovered two different patterns of Internet infidelity: *superficial/informal acts* (e.g., chatting about sports, talking about current events, joking) and *involving/goal-directed* (e.g., disclosing love, viewing personal ads, making plans to meet someone).

The researchers found that superficial/informal acts were rated as less severe than involving/goal-directed ones. When it came to the severity of superficial/informal acts, there were no differences between females and males in this study. However, females did find involving/goal-directed Internet infidelity as more severe than did men. Lastly, the researchers found that people tended to rate their Internet infidelity as less severe than they rated their partner's infidelity on both involving/goal-directed and superficial/informal acts.

Emotional vs. Sexual Infidelity

The lack of physical presence in online relationships drives the need to differentiate between sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity. It seems clear that physical interaction with another individual constitutes sexual infidelity. Still, some individuals might say that as long as there is no sexual intercourse, then there has been no infidelity. If we can't all agree on when cheating has occurred after physical contact, then it is easy to see why there tends to be a great deal of disagreement as to what constitutes emotional infidelity. One might even question whether emotional attachment to an infidel outside of one's primary relationship constitutes infidelity at all. Sexual infidelity involves sexual intimacy and physical involvement. In contrast, emotional infidelity includes "emotional involvement with another person, which leads one's partner to channel emotional resources such as romantic love, time, and attention to someone else." For example, if you receive a promotion at work, it might be assumed that the first person you would tell would be your relational partner. However, if emotional resources have been directed toward another individual, then this individual may be the first individual you might call. The relationship partner might view this as a betrayal or a dependence on another individual, at the very least.

It was initially proposed that women would perceive emotional infidelity as worse than sexual infidelity and that men would perceive sexual infidelity in their partners as worse than emotional infidelity. This proposal was developed from the evolutionary psychology perspective. In summary, this perspective indicates that males would be concerned with sexual infidelity because they had no way of knowing whether their mate was carrying their child and thus carrying on their genetic material. On the other hand, women were more concerned with emotional infidelity because women feared that their male counterparts would become attached to another female and that their resources (e.g., money, time) would be directed toward the other. Although this perspective provides insight into the basic differences between perspectives that might be held by females and males, research consistently shows that both females and males find sexual infidelity to be worse than emotional infidelity.

Researchers reported that sexual infidelity occurred in 30% to 40% of relationships. When sexual infidelity occurs, research shows that how infidelity is discovered determines relational outcomes. Voluntary admission seems to result in increased forgiveness, less likelihood of dissolution, and is the least damaging to relational quality.

Hurtful Messages

"Even in the closest, most satisfying relationships, people sometimes say things that hurt each other." We have all been in the position of having our feelings hurt or hurting the feelings of another. When feelings are hurt, individuals respond in many different ways. Though hurtful messages have existed since humans began interacting, it was in 1994 that Anita L. Vangelisti first developed a typology of hurtful messages. Her work resulted in ten types of messages. She furthered her work by exploring reactions to hurtful messages. First, we will discuss her typology of hurtful messages, and then we will address how individuals respond to hurtful messages.

Types of Hurtful Messages

Evaluations

Evaluations are messages that assess value or worth. These messages are a negative assessment of the other individual that results in hurt feelings. One of the coauthors was once riding in a car with a coworker and his wife. He was driving and made an error. She said, "You are the worst driver ever." The moment was awkward for everyone.

Accusation

The second type of hurtful message is an accusation. Accusations are an assignment of fault or blame. Any number of topics can be addressed in accusations. A common source of conflict in relationships is money. An example of an accusation that might arise in a conflict over money is "You are the reason this family is in constant financial turmoil."

Directives

Directives are the third type of hurtful message and involve an order or a command. "Go to hell" is a common directive in some relationships depicted in movies and television, but it is a more extreme example. In everyday interaction, examples might include "leave me alone," "don't ever call me again," or "stay away from me." One of the coauthors remembers a short-lived relationship in which she called her boyfriend's house. The boyfriend had told his mother that he was out with her. The phone call to his house ultimately resulted in the boyfriend being punished for lying, but he relayed a potentially hurtful message to the coauthor, which was, "Don't ever call my house unless I ask you to." As noted, the relationship was short-lived, but the hurtful message indicating a lack of value for the coauthor's feelings still stings.

Informative Statements

Informative statements are hurtful messages that reveal unwanted information. A supervisor might reveal the following to an employee: "I only hired you because the owner made me." Siblings might reveal "I never wanted a younger sister" or "When Mother was dying, she told me I was her favorite." Friends might say something like, "When you got a job at the same place as me, I felt smothered." Informative messages reveal information that could easily be kept a secret, but are intended to hurt.

Statement of Desire

A statement of desire expresses an individual's preference. A romantic partner might state, "The night I met you, I was more interested in your friend and wanted to go out with him." A friend might say, "Callie has always been a better friend than you." A parent/guardian with multiple children might state, "God only gives you one good child."

Advising Statement

An advising statement calls for a course of action, such as "you need to get yourself some help." One of the coauthors inadvertently communicated an advising statement when a friend was talking about going on so many interviews and not getting hired. The coauthor said, "There are courses that offer interview training. You could take a course in interviewing." The statement hurt the coauthor's friend, as she was only seeking comfort and not advice that seemingly indicated she had poor interview skills.

Question

A question is another type of hurtful message that, when asked, implies something negative. A very direct, hurtful question is, “What is wrong with you?” Another subtler question that might be perceived as hurtful is, “You’ve been at the bank for ten years. Have you been promoted yet?”

Threats

Threats are messages that indicate a desire to inflict harm. Harm can be physical or psychological. For example, a romantic partner might say, “If you go out with your friends tonight, I’m going to break up with you.” A direct physical threat is a statement directed toward inflicting bodily harm, such as “I’m going to beat the heck out of you if you don’t change out of that outfit.”

Jokes

Jokes are another type of hurtful message that involves a prank or witticism. For example, a cousin might say to his athletically built female cousin, “What’s up, quarterback thighs?” implying that the female’s looks are masculine. In an organization, a coworker could jokingly comment to a supervisor on the supervisor’s relationship with a subordinate, “I can see who’s really in charge here.” A prank can be hurtful if it results in humiliating or embarrassing the object of the prank. Pranks are sometimes carried too far. *The Breakfast Club* includes a perfect example of a prank carried too far when the jock explains that he and his wrestling buddies duct-taped the butt cheeks of a nerd. It was meant to be funny, but it resulted in physical injury to the nerd. Jokes in the form of witticism are often open to interpretation, but hurt may result if the recipient feels that the sender intended to hurt more than to humor. Pranks that embarrass or cause physical harm often create emotional pain for the recipient.

Lies

Lies are deceptive speech acts that result in the hurt of the recipient. In an episode of *The King of Queens*, Doug tells his wife Carrie that her forehead is too big after she hurt his feelings. He didn’t feel that way, but his words resulted in Carrie trying to cover her forehead because she was embarrassed that her forehead was “too big.” Lies can range from the mundane, such as “I was late for dinner because I was on the phone with my boss,” to “I’m going to San Diego on business.” Lies, when discovered, may result in feelings of being disrespected or betrayed.

Reactions to Hurtful Messages

After exploring the types of hurtful messages that exist, Anita Vangelisti and Linda Crumley investigated the reactions individuals have to hurtful messages. The results of Vangelisti’s and Crumley’s investigation revealed three broad categories of reactions: active verbal responses, acquiescent responses, and invulnerable responses.

Active verbal responses involve attacking the other, defending the self, and asking for an explanation. Suppose that you and a romantic partner go to friends' for dinner. Upon entering the home, you take off your shoes. Your romantic partner poses a hurtful question, such as “What is wrong with you? What kind of guest takes off their shoes?” An active verbal response that attacks the other is “nothing is wrong with me. What’s wrong with you, you idiot? Everybody knows wearing street shoes brings in germs and allergens.” Alternatively, one might respond by saying, “Nothing is wrong with me. It is perfectly normal to take one’s shoes off when entering another person’s home.” Finally, one might ask for an explanation, such as “Why do you think there is something wrong with me?”

Acquiescent responses involve crying, conceding, or apologizing. This type of response demonstrates that the message is hurtful or that the recipient believes they have engaged in some wrongdoing. For example, if a friend says, “I never want to see you again,” a conceding response might be, “That’s fine. I won’t bother you anymore.” Alternatively, an apologetic response is, “I am so sorry. Is there something I can do to change your mind?”

Finally, hurtful messages can result in vulnerable responses. We have all heard the phrase “Sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but words will never hurt me.” This phrase, while not true, does demonstrate a desire to demonstrate invulnerability. Reactions of invulnerability range from ignoring the message to laughing. Recall the example from the directive message earlier in which one of the coauthors was told not to call the boyfriend’s house. Although the coauthor felt that the message was disrespectful, the response was to laugh. The boyfriend was told that his “directive” was ridiculous and that if she was going to be used as an excuse, then he should be smart enough to let her in on that little secret unless he was lying to her, too.

Aggression

"Stop being so passive-aggressive!"

You may have said this to someone, or perhaps someone might have said this to you. But what exactly does it mean? Aggression is a behavior intended to cause harm or assert dominance over another person, group, or object.

Forms of Aggression

Aggression can be expressed in different forms, such as:

- **Physical aggression**: using physical force (hitting, kicking, pushing).
- **Verbal aggression**: using words to hurt others (insults, threats, yelling).
- **Relational/social aggression**: harming someone's relationships or social standing (spreading rumors, exclusion).
- **Passive aggression**: expressing hostility indirectly (silent treatment, sarcasm, intentional procrastination).

Relational Aggression

Relational aggression is defined as behaviors that harm others. Harm is created through damaging social relationships or feelings of acceptance. Research on relational aggression indicates that it involves both confrontational and nonconfrontational behaviors. Specific behaviors associated with *confrontation*, or direct behavior, include name-calling, cruel teasing, ridicule, and verbal rejection directed at the target. *Nonconfrontational* or indirect behaviors include spreading rumors, gossiping, and social manipulation. Adolescents use indirect aggression more than direct aggression to harm relationships.

Relationally Aggressive Categories

When researching 11- to 13-year-olds, five categories of relationally aggressive behaviors were identified. The categories are labeled inconsistent friendships, rumors/gossip, excluding/ditching friends, social intimidation, and notes/technological aggression. Additional research identified seven types of relationally aggressive behaviors among high school girls. Based on open-ended descriptions from high school girls, the following categories of relational aggression were found: the physical threat/physical attack, rejection, humiliation, betrayal, personal attack, boy manipulation, and relational depreciation. In addition to the categories of relationship aggression, it is essential to note that gossiping and spreading rumors were the most common forms of relational aggression across age groups.

Relational Aggression in College: Bad and Normal

Current research indicates that relational aggression begins in childhood and extends into the workplace. Maintaining an awareness of this tendency may help to avoid this situation in the future. A challenge with relational aggression among women is that it is known to be negative and yet labeled as normal. : Evidence of this dual perspective on relational aggression among women is found within the media in movies such as *Mean Girls* (also a Broadway musical). Because of the acceptance of this behavior as negative and normal, conversations were held with women to understand their explanation for engaging in negative behavior. Through these conversations, several themes emerged. These themes included (a) girls will be girls; (b) relational aggression as venting; (c) blaming the victim; (d) minimizing their role; and (e) regret. The "girls will be girls" theme is especially problematic because it indicates that women know that relational aggression has negative consequences, but they accept it as normal. Researchers report that college-aged women, when discussing relational aggression, made such statements as ''something you expect [among women], drama and gossip and cattiness'' and ''typical girl stuff.'' They concluded that women continue to engage in relational aggression because it is perceived to be normal. In other words, it is acceptable because everyone is doing it.

The second theme that emerged in discussions of relational aggression among college-aged women was relational aggression as venting. Women regularly described gossiping, name-calling, and talking behind someone's back as cathartic. It was described as a form of stress relief. It was concluded that women view this form of communication as acceptable because it is beneficial. This "excuse" makes it okay to vent to other women, even if it might be harmful if discovered by the target.

The third theme among women discussing relational aggression was "blaming the victim." The majority of women reported

that the targets were to blame for the relationally aggressive behavior because they were either “crazy” or engaged in sexually inappropriate behavior. Other reasons given were that the target was either meant to be for them first or “different.” For example, one girl reported targeting her roommate, whom she knew to be mentally ill. She blamed the girl by stating that the girl should have taken her medicine more regularly to control her behavior better. Additionally, the majority of women in their study stated that they engage in relational aggression because the target engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior.

A fourth theme related to relational aggression emerged in which women attempted to minimize their role. Study participants mainly reported that they were simply going along with the actual perpetrator and acted as an audience member. Individuals described themselves as listeners rather than as the real aggressor. Another way in which women attempted to minimize their role was to compare their behaviors to those of others. This comparison served to demonstrate that their behavior was not as aggressive as that of others.

Finally, women discussed feeling regret for having behaved in a relationally aggressive manner. Though the women did express regret, their regret was generally paired with blaming the victim. For example, participants acknowledged that they felt bad for behaving as they did, even though the target was crazy.

Verbal Aggression

Verbal aggression is defined as communication that attacks an individual’s self-concept, intending to create psychological pain. If you have ever had an argument and been called a name or been put down, then you have been the target of verbal aggression. Verbal aggression is considered a destructive form of communication. Because verbal aggression is regarded as a negative form of communication, researchers have worked to determine characteristics that may increase the likelihood of individuals behaving aggressively. Researchers found that six dimensions of self-esteem (defensive self-enhancement, moral self-approval, lovability, likability, self-control, and identity integration) were significantly and negatively related to trait verbal aggressiveness. A history of familial verbal aggression was positively associated with the perceived acceptability of verbal aggression against a romantic partner, and this association was stronger for individuals with higher behavioral inhibition system scores. Individuals with high behavioral inhibition are more likely to be anxious and react nervously when facing punishment. In other words, people who have been exposed to verbal aggression are more likely to find it acceptable to engage in verbal aggression against a relational partner, especially when the individual also scores high in behavioral inhibition. Also, individuals who score high in behavioral inhibition are more likely to find verbal aggression to be acceptable, regardless of whether they have been exposed to verbal aggression in the past.



Figure 6.4.3: A couple displaying verbal aggression, which is negatively affecting their mental health. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Craig Loftus via Wikimedia Commons)

Perceptions of Verbal Aggression

If your parents/guardians ever told you that it wasn’t what you said, it was the way you said it, then they were offering you sage advice. Research shows that when engaged in interpersonal disputes, smaller amounts of verbal aggression were perceived when

the affirming communicator style (relaxed, friendly, and attentive) was used. Thus, the communicator's style of communication impacted the perception of the message. Table 5.4.1 lists the ten most common examples of verbally aggressive messages.

Table 6.4.1: Verbally Aggressive Messages

Type of Message Example:	Example
Character Attacks	You're a lying jerk!
Competence Attacks	You're too stupid to manage our finances.
Background Attacks	You don't even have a college degree!
Physical Appearance	You are as fat as a pig!
Maledictions	I wish you were dead.
Teasing	Your hair color makes you look like a clown.
Ridicule	Your nose looks like a beak.
Threats	I'll leave you, and you won't have a dime to your name.
Swearing	Go to ____!
Nonverbal Emblems	: shaking fists, "flipping off."

Defensiveness

Defensiveness is closely connected to the dark side of communication because it influences how conflict affects relationships. Defensive communication involves judgment, criticism, and control. When people feel attacked, they are more likely to become defensive, stop listening, and make the conflict worse. Cupach and Spitzberg (2011) note that these negative communication behaviors can damage trust and relationships, and Gottman (1994) found that defensiveness is a major predictor of relationship problems.

Bullying

Bullying is a form of communication in which an aggressive individual targets an individual who is perceived to be weaker. **Bullying** is a form of aggressive behavior in which a person of greater power attempts to inflict harm or discomfort on individuals. This definition also indicates that the behavior is repeated over time. For example, a child might call his friend an idiot on the playground one day. A single incident of name-calling would not be considered bullying, but if it happened day after day, then the name-calling would be considered bullying. You may have been bullied or known someone who was bullied. It is also possible that you bullied someone. Bullies use their authority, size, or power to create fear in others. Bullying is known to have negative consequences, such as dropping out of school. It was found that the actions of bullies leave their victims feeling helpless, anxious, and depressed. Other researchers report three types of bullying: physical, verbal, and relational.



Figure 6.4.4: A child bullies another child by physically attacking him. (CC BY 3.0; Diego Grez via Wikimedia Commons)

Cyberbullying

The inherent ease of using the Internet and communicating via the Internet has created an excellent and convenient venue for bullying. **Cyberbullying** is intentional harm inflicted through the medium of electronics that is repeated over time. Cyberbullying affects victims academically and socially, with 20% of victims reporting Internet avoidance. When using electronic communication technologies, young people are exposed to interpersonal violence, social aggression, harassment, and mistreatment. Cyberbullying includes behaviors such as flaming, which involves posting provocative or abusive posts, and outing, where personal information is posted. Cyberbullying is so prevalent that social media such as Facebook has policies to help users avoid this phenomenon. Consider how often you engage with your peers through social media versus your counterparts who were teenagers/young adults in the 1980s. Opportunities for communicating with peers were limited to FTF or via landline phones. Thus, opportunities for bullying could be confined to school or landline phones, such that bullying was limited to eight-hour school days and phone calls that could be ended immediately upon becoming uncomfortable. Now, there is no end to when bullying can take place. Cyberbullying can take place 24/7, and the only way to avoid it is to cut off a major form of staying connected with one's world via cell phone or the Internet. Researchers are just now beginning to understand the impact of cyberbullying, and some speculate that cyberbullying is worse than traditional bullying, but research shows mixed results on this assertion.

Physical Bullying

Physical bullying involves hitting, kicking, pulling hair, strapping a female's bra strap, or giving a "wedgie." Witnesses easily observe this type of bullying. You may recall being the victim of these behaviors, engaging in these behaviors, or watching others engage in these behaviors. Physical bullying can be prevented by observers, such as teachers or even peers. There are several Public Service Campaigns directed toward bystanders to let the bystander know that they can help prevent or stop bullying. However, bullies may corner their victims in a more private setting, knowing that the weaker individual will not be able to defend themselves.

Relational Bullying

The second type of bullying is indirect or **relational bullying**. This type of bullying includes either withholding friendship or exclusion. Relational bullying often increases as children age because physical bullying decreases. Relational bullying is particularly problematic because it is very painful for victims, but cannot be readily observed. One might wonder what a teacher or parent/guardian might do when two friends suddenly begin to exclude a third friend. The rejection is so painful, but it seems nearly impossible to require adolescents to continue liking and including the rejected child. An interesting finding about this type of bullying is that females are more likely to engage in this form of bullying.

Verbal Bullying

The third type of bullying is **verbal bullying** and includes threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdowns, or sarcastic comments. This form of bullying is easily observed as well and can be prevented by authorities and peers. The effects of this form of bullying are similar to the impact of physical and relational bullying.

The negative consequences of childhood bullying have driven communication scholars to develop educational tools to provide to teachers and other authority figures. Researchers developed a model to assist teachers in discerning playful, prosocial teasing from destructive bullying. The Teasing Totter Model outlines behaviors that range from prosocial teasing to bullying and offers recommendations for responding to each. Teasing in a prosocial manner is usually done among friends, with laughter involved, and even affection. Bullying, on the other hand, is a repeated negative behavior in which the victim is visibly distressed. There is a clear power difference in size, age, or ability.

Workplace Bullying Typology

Though it is hard to imagine among adults, bullying continues in the work environment. Bullying can lead to loss of employment, poor attendance, and depression. There are several typologies of bullying. In research conducted with nurses, a typology of bullying was created that is particularly comprehensive. The typology of these researchers includes bullying behavior and related tactics. **Workplace bullying behaviors** involve those seen in Figure 5.4.1. As you can see, workplace bullying behaviors involve a wide range of tactics.

What should I do if I'm being bullied, harassed, or attacked by someone on social media?

Facebook offers these tools to help you deal with bullying and harassment. Depending on the seriousness of the situation:

- Unfriend — Only your Facebook friends can contact you through Facebook chat or post messages on your Timeline.
- Block — This will prevent the person from starting chats and messages with you, adding you as a friend, and viewing things you share on your Timeline.
- Report the person or any abusive things they post.
- The best protection against bullying is to learn how to recognize it and how to stop it. Here are some tips about what you should — and shouldn't — do:
- Don't respond. Typically, bullies want to get a response — don't give them one.
- Don't keep it a secret. Use Facebook's Trusted Friend tool to send a copy of the abusive content to someone you trust who can help you deal with the bullying. This will also generate a report to Facebook.
- Document and save. If the attacks persist, you may need to report the activity to an ISP, and they will want to see the messages.

Visit Facebook's Family Safety Center for more information, tools, and resources.

Think About This 6.4.2 What makes a Cyberbully?

In 2013, Anke Görzig and Kjartan Ólafsson set out to determine what makes a bully a cyberbully. They recruited 1,000 Internet-using children aged 9–16 in 25 European countries. The researchers also interviewed at least one of the children's parents for the study. The total sample size was 25,142.

The questionnaire the researchers used was translated into 25 different languages. The interviews took place in the children's home. Any sensitive questions were asked on a private questionnaire. As you can see, this project was a massive undertaking.

Of the 25,142 participants, 2,821 admitted to engaging in behaviors either online or FtF that could be labeled as bullying.

The researchers found that "cyberbullies (all else being equal) were at least four times as likely to engage in risky online activities and twice as likely to spend more time online, as well as finding it easier to be themselves online."[56] Furthermore, the researchers found that girls were more likely to engage in cyberbullying than FtF bullying when compared to their male counterparts.

Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2013). What makes a bully a cyberbully? Unravelling the characteristics of cyberbullies across 25 European countries. *Journal of Children & Media*, 7(1), 9-27. doi.org/10.1080/174 82798.2012.739756

Strategies to Communicate Effectively

Relationships involve work! The media portrays relationships as romantic endeavors, and the darker side of relationships remains buried. In real life, individuals may be inclined to hide relationship difficulties, which further perpetuates the notion that relationships simply happen and that everyone lives happily ever after.

Communicating Anger

Research repeatedly demonstrates that how emotion is communicated will affect the outcome of the communication situation. Relationship partners are more satisfied when positive emotions are communicated rather than negative emotions. Four forms of anger expression have been identified. The four forms of anger expression range from direct and nonthreatening to avoidance and denial of angry feelings. Anger expression is more productive when the emotion is communicated directly and in a nonthreatening manner. In most circumstances, direct communication is more constructive. Table 5.4.2 lists four different forms of expression and describes the behaviors associated with each of these expressions.

Supportiveness

Supportive communication focuses on understanding, respect, and solving the problem instead of blaming the person, whichis a standard modus operandi in defensive behavior (Gibb, 1961). By using supportive communication and focusing on the issue rather than the individual, people can reduce conflict, build trust, and create more positive and productive interactions.

Table 6.4.2: Forms of Expression and Explanation of Form

Form of Expression:	Explanation of Form
Passive Aggression	Indirectly destructively communicate negative affect – “the silent treatment.”
Avoidance	Avoiding the issue, denying angry feelings, pretending not to feel anything
Assertion	Direct statements, non-threatening, explaining anger
Aggression	Direct and threatening, may involve criticism

Affirming Communicator Style

When communicating with one’s relational partner, adopting an affirming communication style may lead to positive outcomes. The affirming communicator style was initially conceptualized to involve friendly, relaxed, and attentive behaviors. The friendly communicator style involves encouraging others, acknowledging others’ contributions, and being tactful in communication with others. The relaxed style involves being calm and collected while avoiding nervous mannerisms that indicate that one is tense. Being attentive involves listening carefully to others and demonstrating an empathic approach to them. Research has demonstrated that the affirming communicator style causes receivers to perceive that there is less verbal aggression.

Deception

One final aspect of the dark side of interpersonal communication to be considered is deceptive communication. We are all familiar with the concept of lying and deception. We are taught from a young age that we should not lie, but we often witness the very people instructing us not to lie engaging in “little white lies” or socially acceptable lies. As communication scholars, we must distinguish between a lie that is told for the benefit of the receiver and a lie that is told with more malicious intent. Lies told with more malicious intent are referred to as deception and are the focus of this section. Judee Burgoon and David Buller define deception as a deliberate act perpetuated by a sender to engender in a receiver beliefs contrary to what the sender believes is true to put the receiver at a disadvantage.” Deceptive communication can exist in any type of relationship and any

context. H. Dan O'Hair and Michael Cody discuss deception as a common message strategy that is used like other forms of communication. They state that deception is often purposeful, goal-directed, and can be used as a relational control device. We will begin our discussion of deception by exploring three types of deception. This discussion will be followed by exploring the work of Jennifer Guthrie and Adrianne Kunkel, who discussed why romantic partners use deception and how often.

Types of Deception

Three types of deception are discussed in the field of communication: falsification, concealment, and equivocation. Falsification is when a source deliberately presents information that is false or fraudulent. For example, the source of deception may state, "I did not drink when I went out last night," even though the source did drink. Researchers have found that falsification is the most common form of deception.

Concealment is another form of deception in which the source deliberately withholds information. For example, if two partners are living in two different states and one partner is offered a job in the same state as the other partner, but the job offer is not revealed to the other partner, then concealment has occurred. Consider the consequences of concealment in this situation. By failing to reveal the job offer, the source is preventing the receiver from operating with all of the known facts. For example, a decision to remain in a long-distance relationship might be affected if one partner is not willing to take a job that will mean living in the same state.

The third form of deception is referred to as equivocation. This form of deception represents a moral grey area for some because some see equivocation as a clear lie. Equivocation is a statement that could be interpreted as having more than one meaning. For example, you ask your romantic partner if she talked to her ex-boyfriend last night, and she says, "No, I didn't talk to him," but she did text with him, then an equivocation has occurred. Technically, the statement, "I did not talk to him," is true, but only technically because communication did occur in a different form. Consider how the answer may have been changed if the question were, "Did you communicate with your ex-boyfriend last night?" Now that we have discussed what deception is and several types of deception, we can examine how deception functions in romantic relationships.

Lies in Romantic Relationships

Jennifer Guthrie and Adrianne Kunkel explored the reasons why romantic partners engage in deception in their article titled "Tell Me Sweet (And Not-So-Sweet) Little Lies: Deception in Romantic Relationships." The researchers asked 67 college students to record their deceptive communication in diaries for seven days. At the end of seven days, the students returned their diaries. The researchers counted the deceptive communication acts in all of the diaries and determined that the 67 students produced 327 deceptive acts in seven days. The results of this part of their study showed that 147 of the deceptive acts were lies, 61 were exaggerations, half-truths accounted for 56 of the deceptive acts, 35 of the deceptive acts were diversionary responses, 26 were secrets, and two uses of deception could not be categorized due to a lack of detail in the diary. On average, each participant engaged in 4.88 deceptive acts in seven days.

In addition to studying how often participants lied, Guthrie and Kunkel were interested in why the students lied. The students provided 334 reasons for the 327 deceptive acts that they reported. The researchers were able to place the 334 reasons into six overarching motives for lying: engaging in relational maintenance, managing face needs, negotiating dialectical tensions, establishing relational control, continuing previous deception, and unknown. In the table that follows, each motive for deception is broken down further.

Through this exploration of the frequency of lies and motives for doing so, Guthrie and Kunkel uncovered an important finding. The students in the study responded positively to examining their deceptive acts. They also discovered that students held inaccurate perceptions of their use of deception and either under-reported or over-reported how often they engaged in deception. The researchers concluded that reflecting upon deception will allow individuals to understand how deception impacts relationships in both positive and negative ways. Awareness seems to be key to managing deception in romantic relationships.

Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional/psychological abuse. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) expands upon this definition and labels domestic violence as "intimate partner violence." These include sexual violence, stalking, physical violence, and psychological aggression. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) describes an intimate partner as a

romantic or sexual partner, including spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, people with whom they dated, were seeing, or “hooked up.”



Figure 6.4.5: A couple in Italy argues in an open-air event. (CC 0 1.0; G.dallorto via Wikimedia Commons)

According to the NISVS 2015 Data Brief, one in three was a victim of contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime. One in four (30 million) women and one in ten (12.1 million) men reported intimate partner violence-related impact which includes being fearful, concerned for safety, injury, need for medical care, needed help from law enforcement, missed at least one day of work, missed at least one day of school, any post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, need for housing services, need for victim advocate services, need for legal services and contacting a crisis hotline.

Sexual violence is a specific form of domestic violence that may be experienced by women and men and includes rape, which can consist of being forcibly penetrated (or penetrating) someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact.

The CDC considers an individual to be a stalking victim if they “experienced multiple stalking tactics or a single stalking tactic multiple times by the same perpetrator and felt very fearful, or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed as a result of the perpetrator’s behavior.”

Am I Being Stalked?

The following behaviors are considered to be stalking by the CDC:

- Unwanted phone calls, voice or text messages, hang-ups
- Unwanted emails, instant messages, and messages through social media
- Unwanted cards, letters, flowers, or presents
- Watching or following from a distance, spying with a listening device, camera, or global positioning system (GPS)
- Approaching or showing up in places, such as the victim’s home, workplace, or school, when it was unwanted
- Leaving strange or potentially threatening items for the victim to find
- Sneaking into the victim’s home or car and doing things to scare the victim or let the victim know the perpetrator had been there

In follow-up questions, respondents who were identified as possible stalking victims were asked about their experiences with two additional tactics:

- Damaged personal property or belongings, such as in their home or car
- Made threats of physical harm

Sally Fiona Kelty explored aggression concerning violent sentiments (Kelty, 2014). In her study, she sought to understand why individuals engaged in violent behavior. Her study demonstrates that individuals who have committed violent acts in a relationship

believe violence is acceptable and are prepared to use violence. This finding suggests that one approach to reducing violence is to focus on changing beliefs and thoughts associated with violence. Strategic communication scholars can create campaigns to target beliefs related to violence. In a similar study, participants predicted that women would become more aggressive while watching videos of males and females in conflict. When watching videos of "fighting" couples, males predicted the conflict would lead to increasing levels of aggression more often than females. Male participants also recommended the use of more aggressive behaviors during conflict. Thus, this study underscores the changing perceptions of the acceptability of aggressive behavior. This same study assessed participants' perceptions of the likelihood of conciliatory strategies on the part of the individuals in fights. Participants in the study believe the chance of forgiveness and resolution decreased as conflict increased. In light of this finding, relational partners should apologize and forgive earlier in conflict to reduce escalation that may increase the chance of violence.

Being Mindful

Gaining an awareness of destructive communication behaviors in relationships may help avoid the emotional consequences of destructive communication as well as the loss of a relationship. Individuals engage in information-seeking strategies to gain insight into the current state of the relationship. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one such strategy is secret testing. This strategy ranges from the not-so-secretive "direct" secret test to the entrapping "triangle test." Other secret tests involve endurance, indirect suggestions, public presentation, separation, and third-party testing. Although secret tests may allow relationship partners to understand their relationship through subtle and sometimes overt information seeking, the direct approach seems to be the one that relationship partners use when they wish to maintain the relationship.

Relational aggression is a harmful form of behavior that serves to either withhold friendship or manipulate the social relationships of another individual. This form of behavior is particularly prevalent among females and begins in early childhood and continues into the workplace. The consequences of relational aggression are emotional pain and withdrawal.

Verbal aggression is a communication strategy in which the self-concept is attacked rather than arguing about the issues of a controversial topic. The impact of verbal aggression can be lessened if the communicator uses an affirming style of communication. Bullying is similar to verbal aggression and relational aggression. Bullying is a destructive form of communication in which the aggressor targets a weaker individual, either in strength, size, or ability. The effects of bullying can range from relatively mild (hurt feelings) to devastating (successful suicide attempts).

One cannot wholly escape the possibility of becoming a victim of the darker side of communication. Still, individuals can work to avoid engaging in the behaviors associated with the dark side of communication. To do so, consider adopting an affirming style of communication, focusing on the topic during arguments rather than the self-concept of others, and working to prevent bullying when it is observed in others. Also, relational aggression can be avoided by refusing to engage in the behavior and refusing to participate when others are doing so. In particular, we should not simply accept that relational aggression is a natural occurrence among females. Finally, talk with your partner about their beliefs concerning aggressive behavior and violence to make sure your partner does not believe violence is an acceptable means of dealing with conflict.

Key Takeaways

- Relational Aggression is a hurtful form of communication that manipulates relationships and social standing.
- The consequences of bullying range from lowered self-esteem to suicide attempts, which may or may not be successful.
- Verbal aggression attacks the self-concept of others rather than attacking an issue.
- Intimate partner violence is pervasive among male and female victims.
- Know your partner's beliefs about the acceptability of aggression and violence.
- There are several ways individuals can attempt to diffuse and downplay the effects of the dark side of interpersonal communication. First, people can learn how to communicate anger effectively. Second, people can develop an affirming communication style. Lastly, people can learn how to be mindful of their communicative behavior.

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6.5: Communication in Friendship and Romantic Relationships

The Cycle of Friendships

When you hear the words “friend” or “friendship,” what comes to mind? In today’s society, the words “friend” and “friendship” can refer to a wide range of different relationships or attachments. We can be friends of a library, museum, opera, theater, etc. We can be a friend to someone in need. We can friend thousands of people on social media platforms like Facebook. We can develop friendships with people in our day-to-day lives at work, in social groups, at school, at church, etc. Some people see their parents/guardians, spouses, and siblings as “friends.” Many of us even have one or more best friends. So, when we look at all of these different areas where we use the word “friend,” do we mean the same thing? In this chapter, we’re going to delve into the world of interpersonal friendships, which at least takes a few items off of our list of friendships (e.g., libraries, museums, operas), but we’re still left with a term that is very difficult to define.



Figure 6.5.1: Two friends embracing each other at an event. Friendships encompass a wide range of settings; they can be school friendships, workplace friendships, gym friendships, etc. (CC BY SA 2.0; Nat Welch via Wikimedia Commons)

Identifying Friendships

Scholars have studied friendship for a very long time. One of the earliest writings on friendship dates back almost 2,400 years. During this time, the Greek philosopher Aristotle described friendship as an important type of interpersonal relationship that provides value to our lives. He identified three kinds of friendship: friendships of utility, pleasure, and virtue (*Nichomachean Ethics*, Book VIII).

Nowadays, interpersonal communication scholars have studied various aspects of friendships and how they function. How important are friends? Why do some people come into our lives for a relatively short period, while others seem to last a lifetime? In this module, we will explore the concept of friendship, different phases a friendship may go through, and relational issues that may emerge in a friendship.

Defining Friendship

What is a friend? Our definition of friendship and the qualities we look for in a friend may differ. Some of us may say a friend is someone we talk to or do activities with regularly. Others may say a friend is someone we can trust or who helps us when we need it. Friendships are personal and dependent on many factors. In this section, we’ll consider different ways a friendship may

be defined and several common characteristics.

A **friendship** is a voluntary interpersonal relationship between two people characterized by mutual affection and influence (Rawlins, 2017). Although friendships may vary from person to person, research suggests there are three types of friendship commonly found in adulthood: reciprocal, associative, and receptive (VanLear, C.A. et al., 2006).

Reciprocal friendships occur when two people (who are peers) develop a friendship that is based on mutual loyalty and commitment. These friendships develop over time and adapt well to external changes (i.e., geographic separation, a job change, a change in a romantic relationship or family life, etc.).

Associative friendships occur when two people (usually acquaintances) develop a friendship based on mutual pleasure. These friendships develop out of convenience and lack the commitment that reciprocal friends share.

Receptive friendships occur when two people (who are not equals) develop a friendship (i.e., a supervisor and subordinate). In some cases, this type of friendship can be mutually beneficial, but it can also become caustic if the person with more power tries to dominate the relationship.

Characteristics of Friendship

Friendships are sometimes described as vulnerable relationships because they are voluntary and based on the availability and mutual interests of others. Research suggests that five characteristics define friendship: voluntary, mutual, personal, affectionate, and equality (Rawlins, 2017). You can see each characteristic of friendship summarized in Table 5.5.1

Table 6.5.1: Characteristics of Friendships

Characteristics	Description
Friendships are **voluntary**.	We choose our friends, and they choose us. The same sentiment is true for ending friendships.
Friendships are **mutual**.	We can influence our friends, and they have the ability to influence us.
Friendships are **personal**.	We know and trust our friends, and they know and trust us.
Friendships are **affectionate**.	We care about our friends, and they care about us.
Friendships are **equal**	We balance our needs with the needs of our friends. While friends may not be equal in everything, power is evenly distributed.

Phases of friendship

Like other types of relationships, friendships move through several phases from formation and maintenance to deterioration and dissolution. The evolution of a friendship can be difficult to define. Each friend may view the friendship a little differently (and may even progress through the phases of friendship at different rates).

Some friendships may last a long time, others may dissolve more quickly. Some friends will be close, while others may be more distant. Many friendships will fluctuate between close and distant at different points in the friendship (Johnson et al., 2003). In this section, we will examine basic phases of friendship.

Formation

A friendship forms when two people move from strangers/acquaintances to potential friends through interpersonal interactions (Bleizer & Adams, 1992). Many factors may influence this process (Fehr, 2000):

- **Environmental factors:** We are more likely to become friends with people we are around (i.e., live near or work with).
- **Situational factors:** We are more likely to become friends with people who are available (i.e., we have a mutual interest in being friends).
- **Interactional factors:** We are more likely to become friends with people we think are physically attractive, socially

appropriate, and receptive to our needs.
- **Additional factors:** We are more likely to become friends with people who are similar. These factors could range from demographic characteristics to conflict management styles or levels of self-disclosure.

Maintenance

When a friendship is established, there are several processes it may go through to maintain the relationship. These processes will vary depending on the people involved and the level of commitment each person has to the friendship. Some friendships will require more interactions and emotional support than others.

Deterioration/Dissolution

When we fail to maintain our friendship, the relationship may move toward deterioration and possible dissolution. There are many reasons why a friendship may move into these phases. Common causes include (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992):

Reasons for the Deterioration/Dissolution of a Relationship

- **Voluntary:** We had a huge fight with our friend, and the conflict remains unresolved.
- **Involuntary:** Our friend dies, so our friendship cannot continue.
- **External:** Our commitments have changed, and we no longer have time to maintain our friendship.
- **Internal:** We don't trust our friend and aren't sure we can continue to be friends.

In this section, we examined the basic phases of friendship. Now we're going to expand this framework by exploring in more detail the processes a relationship goes through and how those processes relate to friendships.

Applying Knapp's Relational Development Model

Knapp (1978) developed a model to describe the different stages a relationship moves through. He categorized these stages into two phases: escalation and termination. Taken together, this model is a useful tool that may help us to understand the cycle of friendship (Knapp, Vangelisti & Caughlin, 2014).

Table 6.5.2: Knapp's Relational Development Model

Phase	Stage	Definition
Escalation (Coming Together)	Initiating	Occurs when people meet and interact for the first time.
	Experimenting	Occurs when people learn more about each other through conversation
	Intensifying	Occurs when people move from being acquaintances to friends.
	Integrating	Occurs when partners form a strong commitment to the relationship
	Bonding	Occurs when partners announce their commitment to each other publicly.
Termination (Coming Apart)	Differentiating	Occurs when partners begin to see their differences as undesirable
	Circumscribing	The quality/quantity of communication between partners decreases.
	Stagnating	Occurs when partners are not communicating with each other as frequently.
	Avoiding	Occurs when partners create a physical and emotional separation from each other.
	Terminating	Occurs when the relationship is officially over.

Now, let's look at an example to see how this theory relates to friendship.

Escalation Phase

Riley and Avery are in college. They met each other as freshmen in a Psychology class. Riley noticed that Avery was a good student who always seemed to be taking notes. She appeared to be well dressed, and Riley liked her bag. When Riley approached Avery after class, they seemed to click. This initial favorable impression is called the *initiation stage*.

The next week after class, Avery asked Riley if she was interested in attending a lecture series with her on Thursday. She was excited to find out Riley was already planning to attend the event. They decided to meet a few minutes before so they could sit together. This is the *experimentation stage*, when common interests are explored, and both people get to know each other better.

A few weeks later, it seems like Riley and Avery are good friends. They seemed to know a lot about one another. They laughed often and seemed to have a lot in common. Riley and Avery have moved into the *intensifying stage* where they reveal more personal information about themselves and interact in less formal ways.

As intimacy in the friendship increases, Riley and Avery move into the *integration stage*. At this point, they seem to share a lot. When Riley ended a high school romantic relationship, Avery was there to cheer her up. When Avery wanted to go to a party, she knew she had a friend who would go with her.

By the end of their freshman year, everyone (who didn't know them before) thought they were childhood friends. Riley and Avery are now in the *bonding stage* of their friendship.

While some friendships may stay in one stage or another of the escalation phase, some friendships may wander into the termination phase. This doesn't mean the friendship is necessarily doomed (yet).

Termination Phase

When Riley and Avery come back to college for their sophomore year, a few things have changed. Riley has a new significant other who lives nearby. Avery accepted a prestigious internship on campus and is spending most of her free time there.

When Riley decides she wants to go to the home football game on Saturday, her first thought (or second thought) isn't to invite Avery. Instead, she decides to go with her boyfriend and his fraternity brothers. When the friendship starts to fade, and people begin to think more individually, they are in the *differentiation stage*.

A few weeks later, Riley and Avery barely noticed that they hadn't talked to each other in several weeks. Avery is still upset about the last time they saw each other. When Riley made a comment she didn't appreciate, the relationship had become strained. She was just fine with a little space between them.

Riley, on the other hand, could not believe how touchy Avery seemed to be and wanted her space, too. They are now in the *circumscribing stage,* where friends limit their conversation and set communication boundaries.

At some point, Riley and Avery talk, but they are both busy doing other things. Their friendship isn't the priority it once was. As communication becomes more limited, they move into the *stagnation stage*.

Several weeks go by, and they don't see each other at all. They don't seem to care much for each other anymore. One day, they happened to be in the cafeteria at the same time. They both see each other, but intentionally avoid making eye contact. At this point, Riley and Avery have moved into the *avoidance stage*.

Eventually, they move on with their lives. They no longer view themselves as friends. When Riley and Avery get to this point, their friendship reaches the *termination stage*.

In this example, Riley and Avery moved through each stage in the relational model (from initiation to termination). This may not be true for all friendships. Some may never cross over into the termination phase. Others may move into the termination phase but return to an earlier stage instead of moving toward an ending. It depends on the people and situations involved.

Communication Issues in Friendships

As the example in the last section described, there are many ways a friendship can move toward termination. It usually doesn't happen overnight. Many of the issues that emerge in friendships have a communication component. This section will focus on

common communication issues in friendships.

Expectations

Each person comes into a friendship with certain expectations. Sometimes those expectations align, and sometimes there are differences. Differing expectations can be problematic if they are not discussed and agreed upon. Expectations may also change over time. What was acceptable in high school may not be acceptable in college or as an adult. When expectations change, a friendship will need to adapt or move toward the termination phase described above.

Gender differences

Men and women communicate differently. Male friendships tend to focus more on shared activities, such as golfing after work on Fridays. Female friendships are generally characterized by shared conversation. Two female friends may prefer to sit on the patio, drink a glass of wine, and talk about their week on Friday evening. When a male is friends with a female, differing expectations may be more challenging to the friendship. At the same time, it may also be viewed as a benefit (the female may enjoy doing activities, and/or the male may like that he has someone to talk to about his day).

Power Dynamics

If there is an unequal power distribution in the friendship, many issues may emerge. For a friendship to thrive, both people need to feel like they have some power in the relationship. When one person attempts to be in charge or control things by telling the other person (through words and deeds) that they are constantly wrong. Even with the most patient person, this will eventually become a problem.

Social media

Friends on social media platforms can be a great way to stay connected with people you no longer live near. But it can also present some challenges. Is a friend on social media that you never talk to otherwise really your friend? It depends on how you want to define a friend. There have also been many things written on the effects of social media that can range from a person being upset when friends don't "like" a post to harassment and cyberbullying. Balancing the benefits of using social media to maintain friendships against the challenges is something we each need to do for ourselves.

Summary

Friendships are important interpersonal relationships. They may be more important to us because they are voluntary and personal (we choose our friends and they choose us). Friends can shape our lives in many ways and help us to define our priorities. They cheer us on and celebrate our successes or support us when we face challenges. We do the same for our friends. Aristotle (1906) best summarizes the value of friendship when he wrote:

We need friends when we are young to keep us from error, when we get old to tend upon us and to carry out those plans which we have not the strength to execute ourselves, and in the prime of life to help us in noble deeds – 'two together' [as Homer says]; for thus we are more efficient both in thought and in action (p. 251).

Gender and Friendships

Based on a more traditional differentiation of both same-sex and opposite sex friendships, early friendship research divided friendships into two categories: communal and agentic. Communal friendships were marked by intimacy, personal/emotional expressiveness, amount of self-disclosure, quality of self-disclosure, confiding, and emotional supportiveness. Agentic friendships, on the other hand, were activity-centered. Figure 1 illustrates three curves associated with these concepts. The first one shows women being communal and men being agentic in their friendships, which was a common perspective on the nature of gender differences and friendships. In reality, research demonstrated that both males and females can have communal relationships even though women report notably higher levels of communality in their friendships (second set of curves). As for agency, women and men were found to both have agentic friendships, and there was considerable overlap between the two groups here, with men being slightly more agentic (seen in the third set of curves).

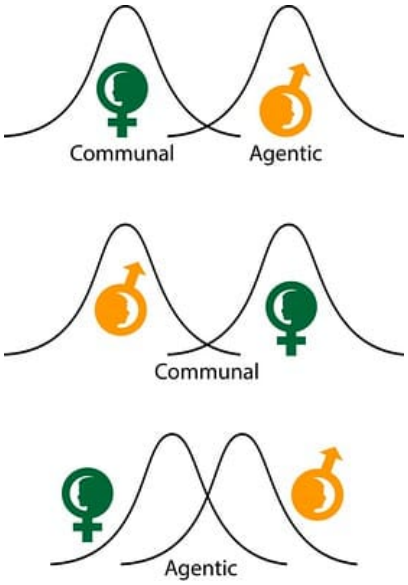


Figure 6.5.2: Communal vs. Agentic: A graphic depicting three curves, each illustrating three concepts. The first curve shows women being communal and men being agentic in their friendships. The second curve shows both men and women being communal. And the third curve shows women and men both being agentic. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; Hannah Kim via Interpersonal Communication- A Mindful Approach to Relationships)

A great deal of research on friendship has focused on sex differences between males and females with regard to friendship. In this section, we're going to start by looking at some of the research specifics of same-sex friendships and then opposite sex friendships. We'll end this section discussing a different way of thinking about these types of relationships.

Same-Sex Friendships



Figure 6.5.3 Two women in Papua New Guinea smiling at each other. (CC BY 2.0; Debra Plueckhahn/AusAID via Wikimedia Commons)

For a lot of research, we use the term "same-sex" to refer to two individuals of the same biological sex as friends. Gerald Phillips and Julia Wood argue that there are four primary reasons females develop friendships with the same sex: activities, personal support, problem-solving, and reciprocation. For female same-sex friendships, the first reason is activity. These are friendships that tend to develop around a specific activity: working out, church, social clubs, etc. For the most part, these friendships stay confined to the activity itself and provide a chance for conversation and noncommittal associations. The second reason is personal support. It's this second category that many highlight when discussing the differences between female and male friendships. Personal support involves friendships where an individual has a personal confidant with whom they can share their

deepest, darkest secrets, concerns, needs, and desires. These friendships are often highly stable and tend to last for a long time. By nature, these friendships tend to be highly communal, which is why we generally discuss them as a key reason for female same-sex friendships. Third, all of us have areas where we're skillful and lack skill. We often develop friendships with people who have skills that are complementary to our own. Consciously or subconsciously, we develop friendships with others out of a need to problem-solve in our daily lives. For example, an information technology specialist may become friends with an accountant. In their friendship, they provide complementary support: computer help and financial advice. Finally, females tend to view their friendships as highly reciprocal. They expect to get out of a friendship what they put into a friendship; it's a mutual exchange. If a female feels her friend is not putting into a relationship the same amount of time and energy, she is less likely to keep sustaining that friendship.



Figure 6.5.4: Two buddies rinse off after the Mud Run. (CC BY SA 2.0; Chris Hunkeler via Wikimedia Commons)

As for male-male friendships, research shows us that they're not drastically different, though their friendships may be framed differently. They still create friendships because of recreation, personal support, problem-solving, and reciprocation. And these relationships can be just as intimate as their female counterparts, but the relationships may look a bit more distinct. First, many male friendships are based around activities: church, work, hobbies, social clubs, etc. These friendships are less about having conversations and more about engaging in the activity at hand. These friendships are not going to be as communal as female friendships that develop around recreation. Often, people mistake these male friendships as being less "intimate" because they do not disclose a lot of information, and there isn't necessarily a lot of talk involved, but males do find these relationships perfectly fulfilling.

Phillips and Woods noted that men often view friendships in terms of teams, having allies and team members. In essence, they create their tight-knit circles of in-group and out-group members based on "team" status. Part of this team status involves performing favors for each other and siding with one another. It's the whole "I've got your back" mentality. We should also note that males are more likely to be friends with those who are the most like them: similar majors, similar religion, similar rungs of the social hierarchy, similar socioeconomic status, similar attitudes, similar interests, etc. Research has even shown that males are more likely to have male friends who are equally physically attractive. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that males are more likely to develop relationships based on social hierarchies. If attractive males are on a higher rung of a social hierarchy, then it's not surprising that the matching effect occurs.

Opposite Sex Friendships



Figure 6.5.5: A woman and a man chat outside a cafe. Friendships between people of the opposite sex remain a topic of debate, with some saying it's impossible, and others arguing that it is completely feasible with the right mindset. (CC BY 3.0; CSIRO via Wikimedia Commons)

“Friendship between a woman and a man? For many people, the idea is charming but improbable.”William Rawlins originally wrote this sentence in 1993 at the start of a chapter about the problems associated with opposite sex or opposite-sex friendships. What do you think? J. Donald O’Meara discusses five distinct challenges that opposite-sex relationships have: emotional bond, sexuality, inequality and power, public relationships, and opportunity structure.

Emotional Bond

First and foremost, in many societies, particularly Western society, females and males are raised to see the opposite sex as potential romantic partners and not friends. One of the inherent problems with opposite-sex friendships is that one of the friends may misinterpret the friendship as romantic. From an emotional sense, the question that must be answered is how friends develop a deep emotional or even loving relationship with someone of the opposite sex. Unfortunately, females are more likely than males to think this is possible. William Rawlins did attempt to differentiate between five distinct love styles that could help distinguish the types of emotional bonds possible: friendship, Platonic love, friendship love, physical love, and romantic love. First, friendship is “a voluntary, mutual, personal and affectionate relationship devoid of expressed sexuality.” Second, Platonic love is an even deeper sense of intimacy and emotional commitment without sexual activity. Third, friendship love is the interplay between friendships and sexual relationships. It’s often characterized by the use of the terms “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” as distinguishing characteristics to denote paired romantic attachments. Fourth, physical love tends to involve high levels of sexual intimacy with love levels of relationship commitment. And finally, there’s romantic love, or a relationship marked by exclusivity about emotional attachment and sexual activity. O’Meara correctly surmises that the challenge for opposite-sex friendships is finding that shared sense of love without one partner slipping into one of the other four categories of love, because often the emotions associated with all five different types of love can be perceived similarly.

Sexuality

The next step in the progression of issues related to opposite-sex friendships is sexuality. Sexual attraction is inherent in any opposite-sex friendship between heterosexual couples. Sexual attraction may not be something initial in a relationship. Still, it could develop further down the line and start to blur the lines between someone’s desire for friendship and a sexual relationship. In any opposite-sex friendship, there will always be a latent or manifested sexual attraction that is possible. Even if one of the parties involved in the friendship is completely unattracted to the other person, it doesn’t mean that the other person isn’t sexually attracted. As such, like it or not, there will always be the potential for the issue of sexuality in opposite-sex friendships once people hit puberty. Now, both parties within a friendship may be mutually sexually attracted to each other and decide openly not to explore that path. You can find someone sexually attractive and not see them as a viable sexual or romantic partner. For example, maybe you both decide not to consider each other viable sexual or romantic partners because you’re already in healthy romantic relationships, or you may realize that your friendship is more important.

Inequality and Power

We live in a world where men and women are not treated equally. As such, a fact of inequality and power imbalance, created by our society, will always exist between people in opposite-sex friendships. As such, males are in a better position to be in an exchange relationship. O'Meara argues that opposite-sex friendships should, therefore, strive to develop communal ones. However, there is also an imbalance that may exist when it comes to communal needs as well. Females are more likely to get their emotional needs met through same-sex friendships. However, males are more likely to get their emotional needs met through opposite sex friendships. This dependence on the opposite sex for emotional needs and support places females in a subordinate position of needing to fulfill those needs.

Public Relationships

The next challenge for opposite-sex friendships involves the public side of friendships. The previous three challenges were all about the private inner workings of the friendship between a female and a male (internal side). This challenge is focused on public displays of opposite-sex friendships. First, others may see an opposite-sex friendship as a romantic relationship. Although not a horrible thing, this could give others the impression that a pair of friends is not available for romantic relationships. If one of the friends is seen on a date, the other could get the impression that the friend is cheating on their significant other. Second, it's possible that others won't believe the couple as "simply being friends." This consistent devaluing of opposite-sex friendships and the favoring of opposite-sex romantic relationships in our society puts a lot of stress on opposite-sex friendships. Devaluing of friendships over romantic relationships can also be seen as a tool to delegitimize opposite-sex friendships. Third, others may question the sexual orientation of the individuals involved in the opposite-sex friendship. If a male is in a friendship relationship with a female, he may be labeled as gay or bisexual for not turning that opposite-sex friendship into a romantic one. The opposite is also true. Lastly, public opposite-sex friendships can cause problems for opposite-sex romantic partners. Although not always the case, it may be very difficult for one member of a romantic relationship to conceive that their partner is in a close friendship-relationship that is not romantic or sexual with a member of the opposite sex. For individuals who have never experienced these types of emotional connections, they may assume that it is impossible and that the opposite-sex friends are just "kidding themselves." Another possible problem for romantic relationships is that the significant other becomes jealous of the opposite-sex friend because they believe that, as the significant other, they should be fulfilling any role an opposite-sex friend is.

Think About This 6.5.1 A New Era of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America

Just as a quick caveat, as of the publication of this book, the Girl Scouts of America is open to transgender children on a case-by-case basis. However, Boy Scouts of America started accepting girls starting in 2017 and is now called Scouts BSA to show this policy change.

Opportunity Structure

The final challenge described by O'Meara was not part of the original four but was described in a subsequent article. This question is primarily focused on how individuals find opportunities to develop opposite-sex friendships. A lot of our social lives are divided into females and males. Girls go to Girl Scouts and Boys to Boy Scouts. Girls play volleyball and softball while boys play football and baseball. Now, that's not to say that there aren't girls who play football or boys who play volleyball, but most of these sports are still highly sex-segregated. As such, when we're growing up, we are more likely to spend social time with the same sex. Ultimately, opposite-sex relationships can develop, but our society is not structured for these to happen naturally in many ways.

Postmodern Friendships

In the previous section, we looked at some of the basic issues of same-sex and opposite-sex friendships; however, a great deal of this line of thinking has been biased by heteronormative patterns of understanding. The noted absence of LGBTQIA+ individuals from a lot of the friendship literature is nothing new. We have needed newer theoretical lenses to help us break free of some of these historical understandings of friendship. "Growing out of poststructuralism, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies, queer theory has been favored by those scholars for whom the heteronormative aspects of everyday life are troubling, in how they condition and govern the possibilities for individuals to build meaningful identities and selves." By taking a purely heteronormative stance in understanding friendships, friendship scholars built a field around basic assumptions about gender

and the nature of gender

Friendship scholar Michael Monsour asked a group of friendship scholars about the definition of “friendship” and found there was little to no consensus. How then, Monsour argues, can researchers be clear in their attempts to define “gender” and “sex” when analyzing same-sex or opposite sex friendships?

Understanding The Roles of Gender and Sex in Friendship

To understand the nature of gender and sex in friendship, Monsour asked us to consider these questions:

- What does it mean to state that two individuals are in a same-sex or opposite sex friendship and/or that they are of the same or opposite sex from one another?
- What decision rules are invoked when deciding whether a particular friendship is one or the other?
- Why must the friendship be one or the other?
- If friendship scholars and researchers believe that all friendships are either same–sex or opposite-sex (and it appears that most do), at a minimum, there should be agreement about what constitutes biological sex. What biological traits make a person a female or a male?
- Are they absolute?
- Are they universal?
- As part of this discussion, Monsour provides an extensive list of areas of controversy related to the terms used for binary gender identity. • What about individuals who are intersexed?
- What about individuals with chromosomal differences outside of traditional XX and XY (e.g., X, Y, XYY, XXX, XXY)? Heck, there are even some XXmales and XYfemales who develop because of chromosomal structural anomalies in the SRY region on the Y chromosome?
- What about bisexual, gay, and lesbian people?
- What about people who are transgendered?
- What about people who are asexual?

As we consider Monsour's thought-provoking questions, it becomes clear that defining friendships as either "same-sex" or "opposite-sex" reflects a limited perspective—one rooted in assumptions about heterosexual, cisgender individuals with XX or XY chromosomes. This framework is both biased and incomplete, overlooking the diversity and complexity of people's identities and friendships.

We should also note that research in the field of communication has noted that an individual’s biological sex contributes to maybe 1% of the differences between “females” and “males.” So, why would we use the words “same” and “opposite” to differentiate friendship lines when there is more similarity between groups than not? As such, we agree with the definition and conceptualization of the term created by Mike Monsour and William Rawlins’ “postmodern friendships.” A **postmodern friendship** is one where the “participants co-construct the individual and dyadic realities within specific friendships. This co-construction involves negotiating and affirming (or not) identities and intersubjectively creating relational and personal realities through communication.” Ultimately, this perspective allows individuals to create their own friendship identities that may or may not be based on any sense of traditional gender identities.

Cross-Group Friendships

As we noted above, research has found that one of the biggest factors in friendship creation is the groups one belongs to (more so for males than females). In this section, we’re going to explore issues related to cross-group friendships. A cross-group friendship is a friendship that exists between two individuals who belong to two or more different cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality). “The phrase, ‘Some of my best friends are…’ is all too typically used by individuals wanting to demonstrate their liberal credentials. ‘Some of my best friends are … gay.’ ‘Some of my best friends are … Black.’ People say, ‘Some of my best friends are …’ and then fill in the blank with whatever marginalized group they care to exonerate themselves.” Often when we hear people make these “Some of my best friends are…” statements, we view them as seriously suspect and question the validity of these relationships as actual friendships. However, many people develop successful cross-group friendships.

It’s important to understand that our cultural identities can help us feel that we are part of the “in-group” or part of the “out-group” as well. Identity in our society is often highly intertwined with marginalization. As noted earlier, we also know that males are more likely to align themselves with others they perceive as similar. Females do this as well, but not to the same degree as

males. In essence, most of us protect our group identities by associating with people we think are like us, so it's not surprising that most of our friendships are with people who are demographically and ideologically similar to us. To a certain extent, we judge members of different out-groups based on our ethnocentric perceptions of behavior. For example, some people ask questions like, "Why does my Black friend talk about race so much?"; "Does my friend have to act 'so' gay when we're in public?"; or "I like my friend, but does she always have to talk to me about her religion?" In these three instances (race, sexual orientation, and religion), we see examples of judging someone's communicative behavior based on their own in-group's communicative behavioral norms. Especially for people who are marginalized, being marginalized is a part of who they are that cannot be separated from how they think and behave. Maybe a friend talks about race because they are part of a marginalized racial group, so this is their experience in life. "This is normal and understandable behavior on the part of these different groups. They are not the ones who make it the focus of their lives. Society—the rest of us—makes race or orientation or gender an issue for them—an issue that they cannot ignore, even if they wanted to. They have to face it every waking moment of their lives." People who live their lives in marginalized groups see this marginalization as part of their daily life, and it's intrinsically intertwined with their identity.



Figure 6.5.6: Two Muslim Women in the May Day Rally March. Most of our friendships are with people who are demographically and ideologically similar to us. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Charles Edward Miller via Wikimedia Commons)

Many of us will have the opportunity to develop cross-group friendships throughout our lives. As our society becomes more diverse, so does the likelihood of developing cross-group friendships. In a large research project examining the outcomes associated with cross-group friendships, the researchers found two factors were the most important when it came to developing cross-group friendships: racism and exposure to cross-group friendships. First, individuals who are racist are less likely to engage in cross-group friendships. Second, actual exposure to cross-group friendships can lead to more intergroup contact and more positive attitudes towards members in those groups. Ultimately, successful cross-group friendships succeed or fail based on two primary factors: time and self-disclosure.

First, successful cross-group friendships take time to develop, so don't expect them to happen overnight. Furthermore, these relationships will take more time to develop as you navigate your cultural differences in addition to the terms of the friendship itself. It's important that when we use the word "time" here, we are not only discussing both longitudinal time, but also the amount of time we spend with the other person. The more we interact with someone from another group, the stronger our friendship will become.

Second, successful cross-group friendships involve high amounts of self-disclosure. We must be open and honest with our thoughts and feelings. We need to discuss not only the surface-level issues in our lives, but also have deeper, more meaningful disclosures about who we are as individuals and who we are as individuals because of our cultural groups. Take the example of Alex and Sue Ellen, two best friends from different racial backgrounds. Sue Ellen grew up in the Southern part of the United States, and Alex grew up in the inner-city area in Los Angeles. When they met, they had very different lived experiences related to both race and geographic differences. Their connection was almost instantaneous, but the friendship grew out of many long nights of conversation over many years.

Mediated Friendships

Probably nothing has more radically altered the meaning of the words “friend” and “friendship” than the widespread use of social technology. Although the Internet has been around since 1969 and was consistently used for the exchange of messages through the 1990s, the public didn’t start to become more actively involved with the technology until it became cheap enough to use in one’s daily life. Before December 1996, using the “information superhighway” was limited to tech professionals, colleges and universities, the government, and hobbyists. The pricing model for Internet use had been similar to that of a telephone subscription. You paid a base rate that allowed you so many hours each month (usually 10) of connected Internet time, and then you paid an additional rate for each subsequent hour. People who were highly active on the Internet racked up enormous bills for their use. All that changed in December 1996 when America Online (AOL) decided to offer unlimited Internet access to the world for $19.95 per month. This change in the pricing structure ultimately led to the first real wave of people jumping online because it was now economically feasible.

Today's nothing like the web landscape of the late 20th Century. And the future internet will look even more different, and perhaps even be replaced by a different mode of connecting people. All this remains to be seen, but for our purposes, we’re going to focus on the issue of mediated friendships in this section.

In the earliest days of online friendships, technology was commonly used to interact with people at larger geographic distances. You met friends in chatrooms or on bulletin boards (precursors to modern social media), and most often, these people were not ones in your town, state, or even country. By 2002, 72% of college students were interacting with their friends online.[66] This was the same year Friendster was created, the year before MySpace came into existence, and a solid two years before Facebook was created (February 4, 2004). So, most interaction in 2002 was through email, instant messaging, and chat rooms. Today, we talk less about using the Internet and more about what types of applications people are using on their smartphones (the first iPhone came out on June 29, 2007). For example, in 2018, 68% of U.S. adults used Facebook. By comparison, 81% of adults aged 18 to 29 use Facebook, while only 41% of U.S. adults over the age of 65 use Facebook.[67] What about other common apps? Statistics show that, among US adults, 73% use YouTube, 35% use Instagram, 29% use Pinterest, 27% use Snapchat, 25% use LinkedIn, 24% use Twitter, and 22% use WhatsApp.

All of these different technologies have enabled us to keep in touch with each other in ways that didn’t exist at the beginning of the 21st Century. As such, the nature of the terms “friend” and “friendship” has changed. For example, how does one differentiate between a friend someone has primarily online and a friend someone sees face-to-face daily? Does the type of technology we use help us explain the nature of our friendships? Let’s explore both of these questions.

What’s a Friend?

As mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, one of the biggest changes to the story of friendships has been the dilution of the term “friendship.” In some ways, this dilution is a result of social networking sites like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, etc. Today, we friend people on social media apps that we wouldn’t have had any contact with 20 years ago. We have expanded the term “friend” to include everything from casual acquaintances to best friends. When we compare William Rawlins’ six stages of friendships to how we use the term “friend” in the mediated context, we see that everything from friendly relations to stabilized friendships gets the same generic term, “friend.”

One Australian writer, Mobinah Ahmad, realized that the term “friend” was being widely used and often didn’t fit the exact nature of the relationships she experienced. She created a six-stage theory (see sidebar) to express how she views the nature of friendships in the time of Facebook. She started by analyzing her 538 “friends” on Facebook. The overwhelming majority of these friends really were acquaintances. In fact, of the 538 friends Ahmad had, she claimed that only one of them was a “true friend.”

Try This 6.5.2 Friendship Acquaintance Six-Stage Theory

Dear Person Who Is Reading This,

Find out where you fit in, and the next time I tell you we aren’t friends, don’t get offended. Now you’ll know why. Love, Moby. P.S. This is not some exclusive thing, where I’m telling people they’re unworthy. It’s telling it like it is.

PreAcquaintance (10% of people I know)

- We don't know each other.
- We know each other's names only.

Acquaintance Level 1: To know of someone, 20% of the people I know

- We know each other through mutual friends/acquaintances.
- We met briefly at a party/social event/university.
- You're a work colleague or business client (whom I haven't spent much time with).
- We run into each other now and then by coincidence.
- Convenient Interactions Meeting up is not planned, but only because it is convenient and easy.
- Details about each other are superficial.

Acquaintance Level 2: Liking & Preliminary Care 30% of people I know

- We went to school/university together, or have known you for a long time.
- We usually meet in groups, rarely one-on-one.
- If you needed my help, I would actively participate in helping them to the best of my ability.
- I can handle a 20-minute small talk chat with you, any longer and I will get bored.

Acquaintance Level 3: Significant Connection & Care 25% of people I know

- We have a really good connection.
- We have some very meaningful talks.
- We care a lot about each other.
- We don't see each other all that much, just now and then when we plan to meet.

PreFriend (AKA Potential Friend) 14% of people I know

- Someone I wish were a friend (as defined below and NOT as society currently defines it)
- I want to spend more time with this person and establish a proper friendship with them.

Friend: Mutual Feelings of Love 1% of people I know

- I care immensely in every domain of their life (academic, physical, and mental well-being) about how their relationships with their loved ones are. I also care about their thoughts, ideas, emotions, and fears.
- I can easily give my honest opinion and thoughts.
- This person notices when I am upset through subtle indications.
- I see this person regularly and feel comfortable contacting them for a deep and meaningful talk.
- Someone who takes initiative and makes sacrifices to work on this friendship.
- Mutual trust, respect, admiration, forgiveness, and unconditional care. Note: If it's not mutual, then we're not friends.

Further Notes

1. There is no shame in being an acquaintance. I think society has made the word derogatory, and that is why it seems offensive. It's just about being honest.
2. Friendship is not that complicated to me (I know, the irony of making up a theory and calling it uncomplicated). There may be a few that cannot be categorized because there is history and shades of grey, but I look at my relationship with most people as being Black or White, categorized, uncomplicated.
3. The theory is flexible in the sense that people can go up or down the levels and understand that throughout a dynamic friendship, people become closer or further apart from each other.
4. My theory originates from personal experiences. I realize that one of my biggest vulnerabilities is that I'm too sentimental;; this theory combats this problem quite efficiently.
5. I understand that this theory cannot be applied to everyone, but it significantly helps me.

Reprinted with Permission of the Author, Mobinah Ahmad.

Now that you've had a minute to read through Mobinah Ahmad's six-stage theory of friendships and acquaintances, how do you see this playing out in your own life? How many people whom you label as "friends" really are acquaintances?

Technologies and Friendships

Today, a lot of our interaction with friends is mediated in some fashion. Whether it's through phone calls and texts or social media, gaming platforms, Skype, and other interactive technologies, we interact with our friends in new and unique ways. For example, a study that came out in 2018 found that 60% of today's teenagers interact with their friends online daily, while only 24% see their friends daily.[71] Interacting online with people is fulfilling some of the basic functions that used to be filled through traditional face-to-face friendships for today's modern teenagers. Teens who spend time interacting with others in an online group or forum say that these interactions played a role in exposing them to new people (74%), making them feel more accepted (68%), figuring out important issues (65%), and helping them through tough times in life (55%).

But are all technologies created equal when it comes to friendships? In a study by Dong Liu and Chia-chen Yang, the researchers set out to determine whether the way we perceive our friendships differs based on the communication technologies we use to interact. The researchers examined data gathered from 22 different research samples collected by researchers around the world. Ultimately, they found that there is a difference in how we use technologies to interact with friends. They labeled the two different categories Internet-independent (e.g., calls, texts) and Internet-dependent (e.g., instant messaging, social networking sites, gaming). Of the different technologies examined, "Mobile phone-based channels had stronger associations with friendship closeness, suggesting that phone calls and texting were predominantly used with closest associates." As a side note, the researchers did not find sex differences in communication technologies and friendship intimacy.

Romantic Relationships

Romance is everywhere. We see it depicted in movies, television shows, and advertisements. We hear it in music. We read about it in literature, fortune cookies, and astrology. We even see romance in sports when one partner proposes to another on the big screen.

These messages remind us of our basic emotional needs and desires for close interpersonal relationships. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that the need to belong and develop significant, positive interpersonal relationships is a fundamental human motivation. They further argue that the satisfaction we receive from romantic relationships cannot be obtained through nonromantic relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The images and words we are bombarded with in the media serve a purpose. To better understand this purpose, let's begin by exploring the changing definition of a romantic relationship.

Defining Romantic Relationships

Traditionally, a specific event (i.e., a wedding) determined the status of a romantic relationship. Couples were referred to as premarital (if they weren't married) or marital (if they were). This distinction also described well-defined social norms that dictated acceptable behaviors and interactions for each type of couple. In recent years (and for many reasons), the lines regarding romantic relationships have blurred.



Figure 6.5.7: A man on bended knee proposes marriage to his girlfriend. Marriage is seen by many as the culmination of a romantic relationship. (CC BY 2.0; epSos.de via Wikimedia Commons)

A **romantic relationship** is defined as mutual, ongoing, and voluntary interactions between two partners that are characterized by specific expressions of affection and intimacy (Collins et al., 2009). This definition reflects contemporary ideas about romantic relationships. For example, marital status and partner gender are ambiguous. Instead, this definition focuses on *interactions* (i.e., mutual, ongoing, and voluntary) and *expressions* (i.e., affection and intimacy).

Types of couples

Fitzpatrick (1988) argued that gender differences played a role in defining a variety of couple types. Each couple's attitudes and beliefs about their partner and relationship influence communication patterns, responses to conflict, and level of relational satisfaction. Let's take a closer look at four types of couples: traditional, independent, separate, and mixed.

Traditional couples are highly interdependent and display relatively conventional ideological values. These couples traditionally view gender and often split duties based on gender roles. When conflict arises, they openly engage the issue(s) but avoid using negative communication (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Independent couples value connection and personal autonomy. They display relatively unconventional values about relational and family life. Gender roles are more fluid. Independent couples are more likely to engage in conflict on both major and minor issues. Each partner operates independently and makes contributions to the relationship based on their personal preferences, more so than tradition (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Separate couples are ambivalent about their values concerning relational and family life. They typically have a conventional orientation toward marriage, but an unconventional orientation toward individual freedom. When conflict arises, they tend to withdraw; however, when they decide to engage in conflict, an argument can turn hostile quickly. In a separate couple, each partner functions autonomously (they do what they want and stay out of each other's way) (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Mixed couples occur when each partner has a different definition of the relationship (i.e., one partner is traditional, and the other partner is independent). Mixed couples are more ambiguous in their roles and expectations. Many factors can influence when and how we initiate a romantic relationship. In the next section, we'll look at some of these factors.

Initiating Romantic Relationships

When seeking a potential romantic partner, how do we decide who's the right fit? Researchers believe that two characteristics greatly influence our decision-making: physical attraction and similarity.

We make initial decisions about approaching a potential partner largely based on how physically attractive we perceive that person to be. The *matching hypothesis* suggests that we generally prefer to date people we view as highly attractive. But we often

pair with partners who share a similar level of attractiveness (Walster et al, 1966).

We also tend to select partners who are similar to us (Surra, Gray, Boettcher, Cottle, & West, 2006). These similarities may be based on leisure activities and hobbies. For example, if we enjoy bowling (or another activity), we will likely be more compatible with a partner who also likes bowling (or another activity we like).

This idea also rings true for more significant aspects of self (i.e., how we see the world). If we believe that partners should share in household responsibilities and our partner balks at the idea of vacuuming, we have a problem. What are our options?

We can discuss and negotiate who's responsible for what (maybe our partner hates vacuuming but has no problem cleaning the bathroom). Or we may find out that our partner traditionally views gender roles and doesn't plan on helping with household chores. In this case, we may need to reconsider our compatibility.

Some researchers believe that we choose one partner over another based largely on chance (Lykken & Tellegren, 1993). Others suggest that attraction is the result of biochemical reactions in the body (Fisher, 1992). Yet others argue that partner selection is an attempt to maximize reproductive value (Buss, 1994).

Selection by Chance

When two people meet and begin to develop a romance, the stars must align. The decision to walk into a specific coffee shop on a specific day and begin a conversation with an attractive person about pet food is a matter of luck. This is the basic premise of researchers who believe we choose a romantic partner based on chance.

What if you decided to save your money that day and drink coffee at home? What if you go through the drive-thru? From this perspective, timing is everything.

Selection Based on Biochemistry

No matter what your brain says, your body will not betray how you feel. When you meet an attractive person, you may experience a sudden shift in your physiology (i.e., your heart may flutter or you may feel like you have butterflies in your stomach). In a different situation, you may be attracted to another person physically, but when you get closer, you realize they don't smell very good and decide to walk away.

Researchers from this perspective argue that we feel specific sensations when we meet potential partners. These physical sensations are biochemical reactions to pheromones. The outcome depends on how we interpret these feelings.

Selection Based on Maximal Reproductive Value

One person buys a sports car to exhibit a sense of status. Another person buys expensive clothes and wears makeup to present a certain image. A third person gets a haircut and uses a particular type of cologne or perfume. In each case, the person makes choices about their appearance to attract attention from potential partners. Are these choices simply about displays of attractiveness and status?

Some researchers believe that these choices are made because of biology. Our genes want to be replicated, so we search for the fittest partner to carry on our genetics through procreation. Whether we want to have children or not is of little importance to our genes. From this perspective, our genes drive our behavior.

Factors Influencing Relationship Formation Success

Many factors influence how we form romantic relationships and the reasons behind them. Segrin and Flora (2019) point to factors such as upbringing, values, attractiveness, and interaction patterns. In this section, we'll take a closer look at each.

A common saying that you might hear is, "If you want to know how your husband/wife will treat you, look at how he/she treats his/her mother/father."This statement points to the role early familial relationships and upbringing play in selecting a partner. *Attachment theory* suggests that we enter the world programmed to form attachments. Because our earliest bonds are formed with our primary caregivers, those relationships greatly influence us throughout our lives (Bowlby, 2008).



Figure 6.5.8: Happy parents with their baby. The next phase for many who enter into committed relationships. is to start families with their partners. (CC 0; Sheldon via Wikimedia Commons)

Many scholars agree that the information we gather through early interactions with a potential partner helps us to determine whether to initiate a romantic relationship. This phenomenon is explained by *social penetration theory*. This theory suggests that trust and intimacy develop as a relationship deepens through self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

When we begin interactions with a romantic partner, we share many (less personal) facts about ourselves through small talk. As the relationship intensifies, our rate of self-disclosure slows, but the facts we share become more intimate and personal. This process of self-disclosure is essential to relational development (i.e., whether or not we decide to continue in the relationship). Overall, the formation of a relationship can depend on several factors.

Expectations

When two people decide to pursue a romantic relationship with each other, many things can happen. The success (or failure) of the relationship often depends on each person's expectations and the influence others may have on it. Consider the example scenarios below:

Example 6.5.1 Who Should Call?

Scenario 1:

You: My date last night was great! They were funny and kind, and even paid for dinner. I think this person could be the one.

Friend: Wow, that's amazing. I can't wait to hear about your next date.

....[One week later]...

You: They haven't called since our date last week.

Friend: Maybe something came up, you should call them.

You: But, that's their job!

Based on the dialogue above

And the expectations of your date, what do you think the potential for success might be for your relationship?

Example 6.5.2 Unforeseen Changes

Scenario 2:

Taylor and Kelly (who are both Catholic) decide to get married. A year later, Taylor decides he wants to join the Church of Scientology. Kelly can't understand why and wonders if she married the right person.

Kelly had no idea about this change in Taylor's views. Are Kelly's expectations of Taylor realistic? What is a way to smooth this bump in the road, to ensure a successful relationship for Kelly and Taylor?

Example 6.5.3 For Better Or For Worse?

Scenario 3:

Sloan and Jaylen have dated for years. But Sloan is keeping a secret. He is embarrassed to admit to Jaylen that he wants to pursue a career as a circus performer. This has been a dream of Sloan's since childhood, but when he shares this dream with his parents, he was shamed and disciplined into becoming an accountant. Jaylen likes that Sloan is an accountant. It's a sensible profession and represents their shared values. One day, Sloan arrives at a restaurant a few minutes late for dinner with Jaylen. Sloan is wearing a clown costume. Halloween is months away...an explanation is necessary.

Secrets can be very damaging to a relationship, particularly if they impact a partner's views of their significant other. How can Sloan navigate this awkward situation and help Jaylen understand how he feels?

Our expectations shape how we view and interpret the world around us. Our upbringing, interactions with others, and value system help us to develop our expectations in both conscious and unconscious ways. In moments of internal discord, we have to decide what is acceptable (or not) and communicate our needs. If we don't express our feelings on the subject and try to ignore them, resentment can be sown into the shadows of our experience.

Social exchange theory suggests that we interact with others through an exchange process that includes a cost-benefit analysis (Homans, 1958). We weigh the costs and benefits of social relationships and attempt to maximize benefits and minimize costs. If the costs outweigh the benefits, we terminate the relationship.

When our expectations are violated, we may consciously or subconsciously perform a cost-benefit analysis. We may decide that the benefits of the relationship outweigh the costs of an uncomfortable conversation. In this situation, our couple type will be an important factor in how we resolve the conflict.

Romantic Relationships and Social Networks

Social networks influence many of our relationships, including romantic ones. Does your family like your partner? Do you and your partner have friends in common? Research suggests that shared social networks are a strong predictor of the success of long-term romantic relationships (Crozier, 2006).

Network overlap is a term used to describe the number of shared associations a couple has (Milardo & Helms-Erickson, 2000). Researchers believe that network overlap creates many structural and interpersonal elements that positively affect relational outcomes in romantic relationships. Mutual friends are more likely to celebrate the couple's successes, grant favors, provide emotional support, and help the couple manage common stressors (Milardo & Helms-Erickson, 2000).

Research also suggests that romantic partners who frequently communicate with each other and their partner's associates (i.e., friends and family) tend to experience less stress and uncertainty in their relationship (McCornack & Morrison, 2019).

Romantic relationships can be challenging but also rewarding. For many people, romantic relationships fulfill our need for human connection both physically and emotionally.

Health experts claim that participating in a romantic relationship can have many benefits, including (Northwestern Medicine, 2020):

- Decrease our stress level,

- Give us a greater sense of well-being and purpose,
- Promote healthier behaviors and
- Improve longevity.

Romantic relationships can also benefit us emotionally by validating our self-concept and improving our self-esteem (Lancer, 2018).

Key Takeaways

- Although there was a historical perception that same-sex friendships were distinctly different, research has shown that there is more overlap between female-female and male-male friendships than there are actual differences.
- J. Donald O'Meara proposed five distinct challenges that opposite-sex relationships have: emotional bond (males and females are raised to see the opposite sex as potential romantic partners and not friends), sexuality (inherent in any opposite-sex friendship between heterosexual couples is sexual attraction), inequality and power (a fact of inequality and power-imbalance, created by our society, will always exist between people in opposite-sex); public relationships (opposite-sex friendships are often misunderstood and devalued in our society in favor of romantic relationships); and opportunity structure (our society often makes it difficult for opposite-sex friendships to develop).
- Cross-group friendships—relationships between individuals from different cultural or marginalized groups—can challenge in-group biases and ethnocentric assumptions, especially when individuals recognize how marginalization shapes lived experiences.
- The development of cross-group friendships is strongly influenced by attitudes such as racism and by exposure to diverse relationships, with greater exposure leading to more positive intergroup perceptions.
- Successful cross-group friendships require significant time and meaningful self-disclosure, as deeper interaction and honest conversations help individuals navigate cultural differences and build strong, lasting connections.

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6.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

In this chapter, we took a deep dive into Interpersonal Relationships and learned about their multilayered complexities. The chapter highlighted five core areas of interpersonal communication, which were conflict Management Scenarios. Interpersonal communication within the workplace, c. communication in Culture, d. friendship and romantic relationships, and the darker side of interpersonal communication.

One major focus of the chapter is conflict, which differs from simple disagreement. While disagreements are natural differences of opinion, they may escalate into conflict when tolerance for disagreement is low or when arguments turn verbally aggressive. Conflict is defined broadly as an interactive process between individuals or groups with opposing needs, goals, or values. It can range from minor disputes to serious clashes and may serve either destructive or constructive purposes, depending on how it is managed. Understanding conflict as both a normal part of communication and a potential source of growth is essential to navigating interpersonal relationships effectively.

The chapter also highlights organizational communication, which encompasses both internal and external messaging within a workplace. Internally, it involves communication between employees and management, training materials, and workplace dynamics—including professional emails, documentation, and interpersonal exchanges. Externally, it includes public relations, branding, and marketing. A significant part of workplace communication is the complexity of workplace romances, which are defined as mutually desired relationships between employees. These relationships often arise from proximity, similarity, or attraction, and while common, they can influence workplace dynamics in both positive and problematic ways.

Friendship and aggression are also explored as important aspects of interpersonal communication. Friendships are described as voluntary relationships characterized by mutual affection and influence, evolving through phases of formation, maintenance, and sometimes dissolution. Factors such as environment, situation, and similarity shape how friendships develop. Aggression, on the other hand, is defined as behavior intended to cause harm and can manifest in physical, verbal, relational, or passive forms. Recognizing and managing these dynamics is key to building healthier interactions.

The common denominator through this chapter, which is repeatedly underscored, is that strong interpersonal communication skills, such as active listening, empathy, and assertiveness, are vital for fostering meaningful, supportive, and resilient relationships in personal, professional, and social contexts.

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6.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 6

Figure 6.3.1: Low and High-Context Nations

Flags from 10 countries are arranged on a scale from Low Context to High Context. Beginning with Low Context, we see Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, and the United States. Equidistant between the two extremes are France and the United Kingdom. Moving toward High Context, we see Italy, Brazil, the United Arab Emirates, and finally Japan.

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6.9: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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6.9.1: Exercises

6.1: Interpersonal Conflict Management and Resolution

1. Of the five main conflict management styles—integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising, which style of conflict management would you say you have?
2. Do you think factors such as your gender, age, culture, personality, family communication patterns, and goals impact your conflict management style?
3. How does conflict differ from disagreement?

6.2: Interpersonal Communication in the Workplace

1. Do you think companies should have policies on workplace romance? Why or why not?
2. What are some ways that we might be able to overcome biases?
3. How many of your friendships are with people you know from the workplace?

6.3: Culture in Interpersonal Communication

1. Compare and contrast two countries and their levels of context. Why do you think context is such an important cultural characteristic?
2. Think about a co-cultural group that you belong to. Think through Geert Hofstede's six categories used to evaluate differing cultures and apply Hofstede's ideas to your co-culture. Does your co-culture differ from the dominant culture?
3. Imagine you're having an interaction with an individual from India. During the middle of the conversation, you have a feeling that your interactional partner is losing face. What could you do at that point to help rebuild that person's face? Why would you want to do this at all?

6.4: The Dark Side of Communication

1. Create your definition of emotional infidelity. Ask three friends to come up with their definition of emotional infidelity. Compare and contrast the four definitions.
2. After reading the section on Internet infidelity and Internet characteristics, find your example in the popular media that relates to one of the characteristics of the Internet that seems to facilitate infidelity. For example, you might choose the characteristic "speed." Find an article in the popular media in which speed played a role in an individual's ability to "cheat" in the virtual environment.
3. Working in a group, create an example of each type of hurtful message from your own life that you have experienced or witnessed. What was the reaction? Label the reaction according to Vangelisti and Crumley's Reaction Types.

6.5: Friendships and Romantic Interpersonal Relationships

1. In small groups, create a guidebook on friendship. Your group should create a list of ten attributes that a good friend exhibits and describe how to assess whether a potential friend has these attributes. Mark each attribute as "must have," "nice to have," or "optional."Then create a list of five challenges to maintaining a friendship and describe how to avoid each challenge (or determine when each challenge cannot be overcome).Be prepared to share your guidebook with the class and explain how your group made decisions about what would go into your guidebook.
2. Discuss your favorite television show or movie. What type of communication issues do you notice in the friendships on the show? Describe how Knapp's relational model relates to the characters.
3. It's known that men and women communicate differently. What are some of the positive and negative communication characteristics in conversation within each of these gender groups?

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- 6.3: Cultural Characteristics and Communication by Jason S. Wrench, Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, and Katherine S. Thweatt is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/interpersonalcommunication.

6.9.2: Discussion Questions

6.1: Interpersonal Conflict Management and Resolution

1. What is the difference between a disagreement and a conflict?
2. Which conflict management style do you use most often, and why?
3. Why can conflict sometimes be healthy for relationships?

6.2: Interpersonal Communication in the Workplace

1. How can friendships at work help or hurt job performance?
2. What are the risks and benefits of romantic relationships in the workplace?
3. Why are mentors and supervisors important for career growth, and how do trust and communication affect these relationships?

6.3: Culture in Interpersonal Communication

1. How do Hall's concepts of high-context and low-context cultures influence communication across countries?
2. Which of Hofstede's cultural dimensions do you think most affects workplace interactions, and why?
3. How can understanding Ting-Toomey's concept of "face" improve intercultural communication in professional settings?

6.4: The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication

1. Do you feel secret testing is ethical and fair to do, or does it feel unethical to you? Why or why not?
2. How important are apologies to you? Do you agree that sometimes apologies are meaningless because they are used so frequently?
3. Is there a difference between emotional and sexual infidelity? Is one worse than the other, or are both equally damaging?

6.5: Communication in Friendships and Romantic Relationships

1. How would you define friendship in terms of qualities that are most important to you?
2. Do you feel social media helps or hurts friendships?
3. Have you added someone on social media that you didn't know? What made you do it?

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7: POWER AND CULTURE

Overview

Communication is deeply intertwined with power, culture, and identity. Power operates at both structural and individual levels, shaping who can influence whom, through authority, resources, expertise, relationships, or communication. Culture shapes communication by establishing shared meanings, values, and norms that guide behavior, while identity reflects the layered, dynamic ways people see themselves and are recognized by others. Identities, including personal, social, and cultural, emerge and shift across contexts and interactions. Historical and societal processes construct categories such as race, gender, sexuality, and ability, creating systems of advantage and disadvantage. Interpersonal and societal communication both reproduce and challenge these power dynamics, highlighting the critical role of awareness, competence, and ethical engagement in fostering equitable and effective communication.

Chapter Goals

- Define power, describe its types, and explain how individuals influence others through communication.
- Explain the role of culture in shaping communication, social norms, and identity.
- Identify the components of personal, social, and cultural identity and how identity salience shifts across contexts.
- Describe dominant and nondominant identity development and its impact on understanding privilege and oppression.
- Explain how race, gender, sexuality, and ability are socially constructed and intersect with systems of power.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Ability Privilege
- Ableism
- Acceptance
- Acculturation
- Charisma
- Claim
- Code-Switching
- Coercive Power
- Competence
- Conformity
- Cultural Identities
- Culture
- Disability
- Dominant Groups
- Dynamism
- Expert Power
- Ethos
- Feminism
- Gender
- Impairment
- Informational Power
- Integration
- Interability Communication
- Legitimate Power

- Logos
- Nondominant Groups
- Pathos
- Patriarchy
- Personal Identities
- Power
- Prerogative Principle
- Queer
- Race
- Redefinition
- Referent Power
- Reward Power
- Resistance and Separation
- Salience
- Self-Concept
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Social Constructionism
- Social Identities
- Transgender
- Trustworthiness
- Unexamined Identity

7.1: Principles of Power

7.2: Individual and Persuasive Power

7.3: Foundations of Culture and Identity

7.4: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

7.5: Chapter Wrap-Up

7.6: References

7.7: Teacher Resources

7.7.1: Exercises

7.7.2: Discussion Questions

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7.1: Principles of Power

Communication Shaped by Power

Communication is not just about exchanging information; it is also a primary way that influence, authority, and social control are created and maintained. Every interaction, from a casual conversation to a formal policy decision, reflects underlying patterns of who is heard, who is believed, who makes decisions, and who must adapt. These patterns are shaped by power. Understanding power is essential in communication studies because it helps us recognize why interactions unfold the way they do, how inequalities are reinforced or challenged through talk and behavior, and how individuals and groups can use communication to resist, negotiate, or transform existing structures. Before exploring how power works, we first need a clear definition of what power is and how it operates.

Defining Power

Power is the capacity of an individual, group, or social structure to direct, influence, or control the behaviors, thoughts, and/or feelings of others. The use of power can involve ideology, persuasion, intimidation, coercion, or force, and it can be tied to resources, money, institutions, positions, or co-cultural membership (such as gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) Power operates on individual, cultural, and structural levels as well as in our interpersonal relationships. It also generates privilege for individuals and groups of people who hold it and likewise causes disadvantages and oppression for groups who don't. However, we also have the capacity to empower ourselves and others.

Principles of Power

To better understand how power functions in communication, it helps to move beyond the idea that power is simply something a person "has." Instead, power operates according to several core principles that explain how it is created, maintained, perceived, and challenged. These principles highlight that power is dynamic rather than fixed, shaped by relationships rather than existing in isolation, and influenced by social systems as much as by individual behavior. By examining power as perceptual and factual, relative and contextual, dependent on investment, tied to a prerogative nature, and linked to privilege, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how communication both reflects and reproduces power in everyday life.

Power is Both a Perception and a Fact

Power is a perception in the sense that we may think we have power over another person or that they have power over us, when we or they do not. For example, if you were the lead on a project at work, you may think that particular position gives you control and/or influence over the other group members. However, if they don't perceive you to have any power over them, and don't listen to what you tell them to do and you have no way to enforce consequences, then you really don't. In addition, if we admire, respect or love others, we may give them power over us that they otherwise wouldn't have. Conversely, power is also a fact, as there are individuals, groups, and social structures, such as institutions, who can and do direct and control our actions. For example, police officers have the authority to physically restrain people and the legal system has the power to incarcerate.

Example 7.1.1 Simultaneous Perceived and Structural Power

Scenario: A college student believes their professor "has it out for them" and is afraid to speak in class, assuming the professor can lower their grade for disagreeing. In reality, the professor uses a standardized rubric and values discussion. The student's perception of the professor's personal power limits their own participation, even though the professor does not intend to use power in that way.

Impact: The student's belief shapes their behavior more than the actual authority structure. At the same time, the professor *does* hold factual institutional power in grading and academic evaluation. This example shows how both perceived and structural power operate simultaneously, influencing communication choices and participation.

Power is Relative and Contextual

Power exists in all relationships, both personal and professional. How much power we have in comparison to another person may be symmetrical or asymmetrical. In some relationships, we may have more, while in others, we may have less. For example, you may have equal power in your romantic relationship, more power over your child, but less power at your job. Power can increase and decrease, based on context, and over time. For example, the physical context can influence how much power we have in a particular location. We may have more power in our homes, but less power in other locations, such as a classroom. Culture and co-culture also influence power, as some groups hold more power than others.

Example 7.1.2 Power Shifts Across Contexts

Scenario: A high school student feels confident and influential among their friends, often deciding where the group goes after school. At home, however, the same student has little say in household rules set by their caregivers. Later, that student works part-time at a job where their supervisor controls scheduling and tasks.

Impact: The student's power shifts depending on the relationship and setting. Power is not a personal trait they permanently carry; it changes based on role, environment, and social expectations. Communication behaviors (who speaks first, who makes decisions, who defers) shift across contexts.

Power is Influenced by Dependence and Investment

Power is influenced by our level of dependence and investment in a particular relationship, position, or resource. Generally speaking, those who have more dependence or investment are less powerful, while those with less dependence or investment have greater power. For example, someone who is economically dependent on their job but disagrees with a co-worker would be less likely to confront them out of fear of the consequences. Additionally, if someone has more emotional investment in a romantic relationship than the other has, then they will have less relational power.

Example 7.1.3 Dependence Reducing Relational Power

Scenario: Two roommates share an apartment. One roommate has a stable job and family nearby. The other who recently moved to the city, has limited savings and would struggle to find new housing quickly. When conflict arises over cleaning responsibilities, the second roommate avoids confrontation.

Impact: The roommate with fewer alternatives is more dependent on the relationship and living situation, which reduces their relational power. Their communication becomes more cautious and accommodating, illustrating how dependence limits one's willingness to challenge others.

Power is Prerogative

The **prerogative principle** states that the person with more power can make and break the rules. Powerful people can violate norms, break relational rules, and manage interactions without as much penalty as powerless people. These actions may reinforce the power someone holds over another. In addition, the more powerful person has the prerogative to manage both verbal and nonverbal interactions. They can initiate conversations, change topics, interrupt others, initiate touch, and end discussions more easily than less powerful people.

Example 7.1.4 Breaking Norms Using Power

Scenario: In a team meeting, a senior manager frequently interrupts employees, checks their phone while others speak, and ends meetings abruptly. When a junior employee tries similar behaviors in another meeting, they are criticized for being unprofessional.

Impact: The manager's higher-status position gives them the prerogative to bend interaction norms with fewer consequences. This reinforces the power hierarchy and signals whose communication is treated as legitimate and whose is policed.

Power Generates Privilege

Power, whether it is held by an individual or group, grants certain privileges. Often, those with privilege do not realize they hold it because it seems normal and natural, and people usually only focus on the way in which they are disadvantaged. For example, someone who is white but of lower socioeconomic status may not recognize the privileges they have based on skin color and instead focus on how they are disadvantaged due to social class. It is also important to note that because of our unique positionalities and intersecting identities, we are often simultaneously privileged in some ways and disadvantaged in others.

Example 7.1.5 Taken-For-Granted Privileges

Scenario: A heterosexual couple can openly discuss their relationship at work without fear of discrimination. Meanwhile, a coworker in a same-sex relationship avoids mentioning their partner to prevent potential bias.

Impact: The heterosexual couple benefits from relational and social privileges that feel "normal" and therefore invisible to them. The coworker must manage communication more carefully, demonstrating how privilege reduces communicative risk for some groups while increasing it for others.

Recognizing how power and privilege operate in communication is not meant to produce guilt or defensiveness, but awareness and responsibility. When we understand that our communication choices are shaped by larger social structures, we can become more intentional about how we participate in interactions. This might involve noticing when we dominate conversations, questioning assumptions that feel "normal," making space for marginalized voices, or using positions of influence to advocate for equity. Communication is one of the primary ways power is reproduced, but it is also one of the most powerful tools for empowerment, allyship, and social change.

Key Takeaways

- Power in communication is not just something individuals possess; it is relational, dynamic, and shaped by social systems.
- Power operates as both perception and reality, i.e., what people believe about power can be just as influential as formal authority.
- Power shifts across contexts and relationships; it is relative rather than fixed.
- Dependence and investment reduce power, while having alternatives increases it.
- Power often produces invisible privilege for some groups while constraining communication and opportunity for others.

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7.2: Individual and Persuasive Power

Forms of Power

While power often operates at cultural and structural levels, it is also exercised by individuals in everyday interactions. Individual power refers to the ways a person can influence others through position, resources, relationships, skills, or communication. These forms of power show up in classrooms, workplaces, families, friendships, and public life. Understanding individual power helps us recognize how influence works at the interpersonal level and how communication behaviors can either reinforce or challenge power dynamics.

Individual Power

Individuals possess six types of power: coercive, reward, legitimate, referent, expert, and informational. These types of power may overlap, differ according to the manner in which they are implemented, and differ in the ways each type of power is established and maintained.

Coercive Power

Coercive power uses the threat of force to gain compliance from another. Force may include physical, social, emotional, political, or economic means. This type of power is based upon the idea of coercion, and common tactics include threats and punishment. For example, coercion occurs when we imply or threaten that someone will be fired, demoted, or given undesirable assignments.

Example 7.2.1 Fear of Punishment

Scenario: A supervisor tells an employee, "If this report isn't finished by tonight, I'll have to reconsider your role on this team." The employee stays late, not because they agree with the deadline, but because they fear losing status or job security.

Impact: The employee's compliance is based on fear of punishment rather than mutual agreement. While coercive power can produce short-term results, it may damage trust, reduce morale, and harm long-term relationships.

Reward Power

Reward power is based on the right of some to offer or deny tangible, social, emotional, or spiritual rewards to others for doing what is wanted or expected of them. If others expect to be rewarded for doing what someone wants, there's a high probability that they'll do it. Reward power (positive reward) is seen when a child is given money for earning better grades or a student is admitted into an honor society for excellent effort.

Example 7.2.2 Incentives Shaping Behavior

Scenario: A coach promises extra playing time to athletes who attend optional morning practices. Team members increase attendance to gain the reward.

Impact: Behavior is shaped through incentives rather than force. Reward power can motivate and build positive associations, but it may also lead people to act only when a reward is offered rather than from intrinsic motivation.

Legitimate Power

Legitimate power comes from an elected, selected, or appointed position of authority. Legitimate power is formal authority delegated to the holder of the position. It is usually accompanied by various attributes of power, such as a uniform, a title, or an

imposing physical office. People traditionally obey the person with this power solely based on their role, position, or title rather than someone's personal leadership characteristics. A police officer is an example of someone who has legitimate power.

Example 7.2.3 Complying with Authority

Scenario: During an emergency drill, a school principal directs students and teachers where to go. Even those who don't personally know the principal follow instructions.

Impact: Compliance is based on recognition of the principal's official role, not personal traits. Legitimate power helps create order and coordination, but can be misused if authority is unquestioned.

Referent Power

Referent power is the power or ability of individuals to attract others and build loyalty. It is based on the charisma and interpersonal skills of the power holder. This power is often regarded as admiration or charm. A person may be admired because of a specific personal trait, and this admiration creates the opportunity for interpersonal influence. Referent power acts a little like role model power and depends on respecting, liking, and holding another individual in high esteem. We can increase our level of referent power as we build up our interpersonal skills. Communicators that meets others' social needs are often perceived as possessing referent power.

Example 7.2.4 Influence vs. Authority

Scenario: A well-liked student leader encourages classmates to volunteer at a community event. Many sign up because they admire and trust the leader.

Impact: Influence comes from connection and respect rather than authority. Referent power strengthens relationships but can also lead people to follow others without critical thinking.

Expert Power

Expert power is based on what we know, what we experience, and on our special skills or talents. Expertise can be demonstrated by reputation, credentials, and actions. Unlike the others, this type of power is usually highly specific and limited to the particular area in which the expert is trained and qualified. People tend to trust and respect individuals who demonstrate expertise. The expertise does not have to be genuine; it is the perception of expertise that provides the power base.

Example 7.2.5 Expertise Equals Influence

Scenario: During a health scare, coworkers turn to a colleague who previously worked as a nurse for advice on symptoms and precautions.

Impact: The colleague's knowledge gives them influence in this context. Others defer to their expertise, showing how specialized knowledge creates situational power.

Informational Power

Informational power comes as a result of possessing knowledge that others need or want. Information possessed that no one needs or wants is powerless. Informational power extends to the ability to get information based on a position held. Not all information is readily available; some information is closely controlled by a few people, such as national security data. Informational power is a form of personal or collective power that is based on controlling information needed by others in order to reach an important goal. Our society is reliant on informational power as knowledge for influence, decision-making, credibility, and control. How information is used, i.e., sharing it with others, limiting it to key people, keeping it secret from key people, organizing it, increasing it, or even falsifying it, can generate power.

Example 7.2.6 Access to Information

Scenario: A team member has access to data about upcoming organizational changes. Others rely on them for updates and guidance.

Impact: Control over valuable information increases that person's influence in decisions and discussions. Sharing or withholding information shapes group outcomes.

Beyond positional or resource-based forms of power, communication itself is a powerful tool for influence. Even individuals without formal authority can shape beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors through persuasive messages. Persuasive power highlights how credibility, logic, and emotion work together to influence others, showing that communication is not just expressive but transformative.

Persuasive Power

Regardless of the types of individual power we may, or may not, hold, we also have the ability to empower ourselves and influence others through our communicative messages and the use of persuasion. Persuasion has the ability to change the way people think, feel, and act. Persuasion is comprised of three interrelated components: ethos, logos, and pathos.

Ethos

Ethos refers to the credibility of a communicator and includes three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism. **Competence** refers to the perception of a communicator's expertise in relation to the topic being discussed. **Trustworthiness** refers to the degree to which others perceive a communicator as accurate, honest, and unbiased. Perceptions of trustworthiness come from the content of the message as well as the personality of the communicator. **Dynamism** refers to the degree to which others perceive a communicator to be outgoing and animated (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003). Two components of dynamism are charisma and energy. **Charisma** refers to a mixture of abstract and concrete qualities that make a communicator attractive to others.

Charismatic people usually know they are charismatic because they've been told, and people have been attracted to them because of it. Unfortunately, charisma is difficult to intentionally develop, and some people seem to have a naturally charismatic personality, while others do not. Even though everyone can't embody the charismatic aspect of dynamism, the other component of dynamism, energy, is something that everyone can tap into. Communicating enthusiastically and using engaging nonverbals such as vocal variety and eye contact can increase your dynamism.

Logos

Logos refers to the reasoning or logic of an argument. Communicators employ logos by presenting credible information, facts, and statistics. Presenting a rational and logical argument is also an important component of persuasion. When a communicator uses logic, they make a **claim**, which is a statement of belief or opinion. They then provide good reasons to support their claims. In order to persuade another with logic, the reasons presented should be relevant to the claim, well-supported, and meaningful to the listener.

Pathos

Pathos refers to the use of emotional appeals in messages. Stirring emotions in others is a way to get them involved and can create more opportunities for persuasion and action. Learning that homes in your city are being burglarized may get your attention, but think about how different your reaction would be if you found out it was a home in your neighborhood. Communicators have taken advantage of people's emotions to get them to support causes, buy products, or engage in behaviors that they might not do otherwise, if given the chance to see the faulty logic of a message. For example, a politician may try to get your vote by posing for pictures near flags, using patriotic music in their ads, or holding babies at campaign events. None of these actions holds any logical appeal, but they stir up emotions that can make us feel favorable about the politician. Emotional appeals are effective when you are trying to influence a behavior or you want the other person to take immediate action (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003). However, emotions lose their persuasive effect more quickly than other types of persuasive appeals. Since emotions are often reactionary, they fade relatively quickly when a person is removed from the provoking situation (Fletcher, 2001).

Key Takeaways

- Individual power operates in everyday interactions and is expressed through multiple forms, including authority, relationships, knowledge, and communication.
- Coercive and reward power rely on consequences, while referent and expert power depend on relationships and credibility.
- Legitimate power comes from roles and positions, not personal qualities.
- Informational power highlights the influence gained by controlling access to valuable knowledge.
- Persuasion (ethos, logos, and pathos) allows people to influence others even without formal power.

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7.3: Foundations of Culture and Identity

Understanding the Connection Between Culture and Identity

Communication does not occur in a vacuum. The ways we speak, listen, interpret meaning, express emotion, and relate to others are shaped by shared systems of meaning. These systems, formed through history, institutions, and social interaction, are what we call culture. To understand communication competence, conflict, misunderstanding, and connection, we must understand culture and identity, because they influence how we see ourselves, how we see others, and what we consider appropriate, respectful, persuasive, or offensive in interaction.

Defining Culture

Culture is a complicated word to define, and often has an array of meanings across various languages and peoples. For the purposes of examining culture in the context of communication, **culture** can be defined as the ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. This definition emphasizes that culture is not stable or fixed, but rather is negotiated and dynamic, allowing cultural change to be examined over time. This definition emphasizes that culture is learned through socializing institutions such as family, schools, peers, and media, and it is patterned in that shared similarities exist within cultural groups. At the same time, individuals and subgroups may deviate from or resist these patterns, contributing to cultural change. Culture also shapes beliefs about truth and falsehood, attitudes, values, and behaviors, and these influences play a central role in the formation of identity.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

When we ask ourselves the question “Who am I?” we must consider the idea of **self-concept**, which emphasizes that identity develops through reflections received from others. Parents, friends, teachers, and media all contribute to shaping identity. Although this process begins at birth, many people in Western societies reach a point in adolescence when increased cognitive ability and social awareness prompt more deliberate self-reflection. This marks the beginning of a lifelong process of considering who we are, who we were, and who we may become (Tatum, 2000). Identity is a central component of self-concept and is commonly categorized into personal, social, and cultural identities.

Identities should not be understood as fixed or complete. Instead, they emerge through ongoing processes that begin before birth and will continue after we are gone. Therefore, our identities are not something we achieve or complete. Two related but distinct components of our identities are our personal and social identities (Spreckels & Kotthoff, 2009). **Personal identities** consist of intrapersonal characteristics shaped by individual experiences, such as interests or preferences. **Social identities**, in contrast, are derived from participation in and commitment to social groups, reflecting how identity is shaped through interaction and group membership.

For example, aspects of social identity may be derived from family membership or participation in particular communities, such as sports fans. Social identities differ from personal identities in that they are externally organized through group membership. This membership may be voluntary, such as joining a club, or involuntary, such as family membership, and it may be explicit, such as paying dues to a labor union, or implicit, such as regularly purchasing and listening to hip-hop music. There are numerous possibilities for both personal and social identities. While personal identities express individual characteristics, social identities align us with particular groups and communicate both who we are and who we are not.

Personal identities often change as people gain new experiences and interests, such as shifting from online video games to graphic design. Social identities tend to change less frequently because they require interpersonal investment over time. For instance, an interest in online gaming may develop into membership in a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) community, transforming a personal identity into a more stable interpersonal, social identity. **Cultural identities** are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting (Yep, 2002). Since people are often members of various cultural groups from birth, cultural identities are generally the least changeable. The ways of being and the social expectations for behavior within cultural identities do change over time, but what separates them from most social identities is their historical roots (Collier, 1996). Cultural identities are expressed through communication, and acceptance within a cultural group requires **acculturation**, or learning and using recognizable codes. This

process occurs through both direct instruction and indirect exposure, such as messages conveyed through popular culture.

Example 7.3.1 Our Identities Shifting Across Contexts

Scenario: A college student identifies personally as creative and introverted. Socially, they identify as a member of the campus gaming club and a first-generation college student. Culturally, they identify as Filipino American and Catholic. When in a design class, their personal identity as creative is most salient. At a family gathering, their cultural identity and religious values are more prominent. At a campus event for first-generation students, that social identity becomes central.

Impact: The student's communication style, topics of comfort, and sense of belonging shift across contexts. This illustrates how identities are layered, relational, and expressed through communication, depending on which identity is most salient.

Although some identities remain relatively stable, their **salience**, or the degree of awareness and importance attached to them, changes depending on context. An identity may become more salient when it is emphasized by social roles or environments, such as leadership in a cultural organization or participation in international study. Identities may also be ascribed differently across contexts, highlighting how identity is relational and situational. For example, an African American may not have difficulty deciding which box to check on a demographic section of a survey. But if an African American becomes president of her college's Black Student Union, she may more intensely avow her African American identity, which has now become more salient. If she studies abroad in Africa during her junior year, she may be ascribed an identity of American by her new African friends rather than African American. For the African friends in this context, their visitor's identity as American is likely more salient than her identity as someone of African descent. For individuals who are biracial or multiracial, identity salience may shift during periods of exploration and self-definition. One intercultural communication scholar writes of his experiences as an "Asianlatinoamerican" (Yep, 2002). He notes repressing his Chinese identity as an adolescent living in Peru and then later embracing his Chinese identity and learning about his family history while in college in the United States, showing how even national identity fluctuates. These examples illustrate that identity is not static but continually shaped through social interaction.

Throughout modern history, cultural and social influences have established dominant and nondominant groups (Allen, 2011). **Dominant groups** tend to have greater access to resources and power, while **nondominant groups** face systemic disadvantages. These patterns operate at the societal level, even though individual exceptions exist, like people in groups considered nondominant obtaining more resources and power than a person in a dominant group. As a result of institutionalized differences, members of dominant groups often experience privilege, while nondominant groups may encounter discrimination, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. Privilege and disadvantage exist along a continuum, as no individual is entirely privileged or entirely disadvantaged, and social identities intersect in complex ways.

Identity Development

There are multiple models for examining identity development. Given a focus on how difference matters, this section examines similarities and differences in dominant and nondominant identity formation. Although the stages in this model help explain common identity experiences, identity development is complex and may vary across individuals. People also hold multiple identities that intersect with one another, shaping how identity is experienced. As these models are considered, it is important to reflect on how identity development may differ for individuals with multiple dominant and/or nondominant identities.

Nondominant Identity Development

There are four stages of nondominant identity development (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The first stage, **unexamined identity**, is marked by limited awareness of or interest in one's identity. If limited awareness or lack of interest in one's identity is replaced by an investment in a dominant group identity, individuals may move into the conformity stage.

In the **conformity** stage, individuals internalize, or adopt, the values and norms of the dominant group to avoid being perceived as different. This often involves attempts to assimilate by altering appearance, speech, mannerisms, or names. For instance, Moises, a Chicano man interviewed in a research project about identities, narrated how he changed his "Mexican-sounding" name to Moses, which was easier for his middle-school classmates and teachers to say (Jones Jr., 2009). He also identified as white instead of Mexican American or Chicano because he saw how his teachers treated the other kids with "brown skin." Similarly, some gay or lesbian individuals in this stage may attempt to "act straight." When individuals realize that assimilation does not result in full acceptance, they may progress to the resistance and separation stage.

The **resistance and separation** stage involves rejecting dominant group norms and actively challenging dominant identities. Individuals may also seek separation by primarily interacting with others who share their nondominant identity. For example, there has been a Deaf culture movement in the U.S. for decades. This movement includes people who are hearing impaired and believe that their use of a specific language, American Sign Language (ASL), and other cultural practices constitutes a unique culture, which they symbolize by capitalizing the D in Deaf (Allen, 2011). Although this is not a separatist movement, individuals who are hearing impaired may find refuge and support within such groups after experiencing discrimination from hearing people. Remaining in this stage may reflect limited critical engagement if individuals adopt the values of the nondominant group without reflection.

The **integration** stage represents a point at which individuals with a nondominant identity balance embracing their own identity, while simultaneously valuing other dominant and nondominant identities. While residual anger related to discrimination and prejudice may remain, this energy is often redirected toward constructive efforts, such as working to reduce discrimination affecting their own or other groups. For example, Moises, the Chicano man discussed earlier, now advocates for the Chicano community in his city and actively supports gay rights and women's rights.

Example 7.3.2 Assimilation to Advocacy

Scenario: A Latina student growing up in a predominantly white school avoids speaking Spanish and downplays her cultural background (conformity stage). In college, after taking ethnic studies courses, she becomes more vocal about discrimination and primarily socializes within Latino student groups (resistance and separation stage). Later, she embraces her cultural identity while also collaborating across groups in social justice organizations (integration stage).

Impact: Her communication shifts from assimilation to advocacy to bridge-building. This demonstrates how identity development affects who we communicate with, how we speak about difference, and how we engage with systems of power.

Dominant Identity Development

Dominant identity development consists of five stages (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The unexamined stage of dominant identity formation is similar to nondominant in that individuals in this stage do not think about their own or others' identities. Although differences such as race or gender may be noticed, the existence or impact of social hierarchies is often unrecognized or viewed as irrelevant. For example, a man may take notice that a woman was elected to a prominent office. However, he may not recognize the underlying reason this stands out, namely that the overwhelming majority of political leaders have historically been men. Since people with dominant identities are less likely to experience discrimination, they may remain in this stage for extended periods.

In the **acceptance** stage, individuals acknowledge that inequality exists but do not take action to address it, internally or externally. In the passive acceptance stage, we must be cautious not to blame individuals with dominant identities for internalizing racist, sexist, or heterosexist norms. Passive acceptance often reflects the internalization of norms learned through socializing institutions such as family, media, religion, and education, which often make oppression seem normal and natural. Individuals may believe in equality in principle while overlooking privilege and institutionalized oppression, sometimes interpreting inequities as exaggerated or the result of a lack of individual effort. Some may move into active acceptance, openly endorsing the perceived superiority of the dominant group. Progress beyond this stage often occurs through sustained interactions or experiences that challenge existing beliefs, such as befriending someone from a nondominant group or taking a course related to culture.

The resistance stage represents a significant shift, as individuals recognize unearned privilege and may experience guilt or shame. This awareness can lead to distancing from others within the dominant group, though retreat alone does not address inequality. While this stage reflects increased awareness, remaining in resistance can limit productive engagement because people are often retreating rather than trying to address injustice. Sharing knowledge and engaging others may lead individuals toward the next stage, redefinition.

In the **redefinition** stage, individuals reject negative assumptions about their dominant identity and seek to use their social power to support equity and social justice. They realize that they can claim their dominant identity as heterosexual, able-bodied, male, white, etc., and perform their identity in ways that counter norms. For example, in a research project on identity, a male participant said, "I don't want to assert my maleness the same way that maleness is asserted all around us all the time. I don't want to contribute to sexism. So I have to be conscious of that. There's that guilt. But then, I try to utilize my maleness in positive ways, like when I'm talking to other men about male privilege," (Jones Jr., 2009).

The final stage, integration, occurs when individuals fully incorporate their dominant identity into their lives while acting as informed allies to nondominant groups. At this stage, individuals educate others about privilege and engage in advocacy, such as participating in organizations that support marginalized communities. For example, some heterosexual people who find out a friend or family member is gay or lesbian may have to confront their dominant heterosexual identity for the first time, which may lead them through these various stages. As a sign of integration, some may join an organization like PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), where they can be around others who share their dominant identity as heterosexuals but also empathize with their loved ones.



Figure 7.3.1: People from the Columbia/Howard County chapter of PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) hold a banner as they march and celebrate during the 2010 Washington, D.C. Pride Parade, part of the annual Capital Pride festival honoring LGBTQIA+ communities and allies. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Tim Evanson via Wikimedia Commons)

Becoming aware of these stages of dominant and nondominant identity development provides a foundation for examining why difference matters in communication and society. Understanding identity development helps explain why people may respond very differently to conversations about culture, privilege, and inequality. Some individuals may not yet see identity as relevant, while others may feel strong emotions connected to lived experiences of discrimination or guilt about privilege. Recognizing these developmental differences can help us approach intercultural communication with more patience, empathy, and awareness of where others may be in their identity journeys.

Example 7.3.3 Avoidance to Engagement

Scenario: A white student initially believes "race doesn't matter" (unexamined stage). After learning about systemic racism, they acknowledge inequality but feel unsure how to respond (acceptance). Later, they feel guilt and withdraw from conversations about race (resistance). Over time, they begin challenging racist jokes among friends and educating themselves (redefinition). Eventually, they regularly support equity initiatives and use their voice to advocate for change (integration).

Impact: Their communication evolves from avoidance to active engagement. This model shows how increased awareness of privilege can lead to more responsible and equity-focused communication.

Difference Matters

Whenever we encounter others, we notice similarities and differences. While both matter, differences are often emphasized and can contribute to communication problems. Beyond individual distinctions, people are categorized into in-groups and out-groups based on perceived similarities and differences. This categorization is significant because we then tend to react to someone we perceive as a member of an out-group based on the characteristics we attach to the group rather than the individual (Allen, 2011). This increases the likelihood that stereotypes and prejudice will influence communication. Understanding difference and

its significance supports the development of communication competence. Ignoring differences by claiming that all people are simply human overlooks the historical and social processes that have made differences culturally meaningful and that continue to shape communication today.

Culture and identity are complex, and dominance among groups is not natural or inevitable. There is, however, an ideology of domination that makes it seem natural and normal to many that some people or groups will always have power over others (Allen, 2011). Difference matters because it is tied to unequal treatment, and understanding how these differences developed can support efforts toward a more just society. Difference also matters because demographics and patterns of interaction are changing.

In the U.S., the population of people of color is increasing and diversifying, and visibility for people who are gay or lesbian and people with disabilities has grown. The 2010 Census shows that the Hispanic and Latino/a populations in the United States are now the second largest group in the country, having grown 43 percent since the last census in 2000 (Saenz, 2011). By 2030, racial and ethnic minorities are projected to comprise one-third of the population (Allen, 2011). Legal and social changes have also created greater visibility and access for sexual minorities and people with disabilities. These shifts affect interpersonal relationships, particularly in workplaces, where organizations respond through legal compliance and, increasingly, through efforts to create inclusive climates that recognize the interpersonal and economic benefits of diversity.

Difference matters due to the inequalities that exist among cultural groups and due to changing demographics that affect our personal and social relationships. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles that may impede our valuing of difference (Allen, 2011). People with dominant identities may minimize or dismiss the experiences of nondominant groups because they do not experience oppression directly and may not recognize the role of privilege. This lack of recognition for oppression can lead members of dominant groups to minimize, dismiss, and/or question the experiences of nondominant groups, causing them to view nondominant group members as overly sensitive or prone to complaining.

Conversely, members of nondominant groups may struggle to value difference due to repeated invalidation of their experiences. Both groups may avoid discussing differences due to norms of political correctness and fear of being perceived as insensitive, biased, racist, sexist, homophobic, and so on. Although these barriers are common and understandable, developing intercultural communication competence can help foster awareness, reflection, and more constructive engagement across differences in order to intervene in these negative cycles.

Power and the Cross Sections of Culture and Identity

Culture and identity are deeply connected to power. Social identities are not only sources of meaning and belonging but also positions within systems of advantage and disadvantage. The intersections of identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and ability, shape how much access people have to resources, credibility, safety, and voice. Communication is one of the primary ways these power dynamics are enacted: who gets interrupted, who is believed, whose language is considered “professional,” and whose experiences are validated. At the same time, communication is also a site of resistance, where individuals and groups challenge stereotypes, redefine identities, and advocate for equity.

Key Takeaways

- Culture is dynamic, learned, and patterned, shaping communication norms, values, and identities.
- Identity is layered (personal, social, cultural) and shifts in salience depending on context and interaction.
- Dominant and nondominant identity development influence how people understand privilege, oppression, and difference.
- Identity development affects communication behaviors, including avoidance, assimilation, advocacy, and allyship.
- Power operates through cultural identities, but communication can both reproduce and challenge inequality.

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7.4: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

Understanding Identity

To understand who we are today, we have to look at how categories of identity were formed, named, and given meaning over time. Identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and ability often feel natural or obvious, but they are shaped by history, institutions, and communication. The words we use, the stories we tell, the laws we create, and the media we consume all help construct what identities mean and how people within those categories are treated. Exploring identity through a communication lens reveals how social meanings are created, maintained, and sometimes challenged.

Understanding contemporary cultural identities requires examining how they developed over time. Historically, identities often perceived as timeless were actually constructed for specific social and political purposes and have continued to evolve. Communication is central to this process, as identities are relational, communicative, and socially constructed. **Social constructionism** is a view that argues the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relationship to social, cultural, and political contexts (Allen, 2011). This section examines how race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability have been constructed in the United States and the role communication plays in shaping these identities. Beyond race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, there are many additional intersecting identities such as religion, age, nationality, and class. While exploring this section, consider how all of these identities may intersect.

Race

Human beings, regardless of racial classification, share 99.9 percent of their DNA, indicating that **race** is a social construct rather than a biological reality (Human Genome Project). The American Anthropological Association agrees, stating that race is the product of "historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances" (Allen, 2011). In this text, race is understood as a socially constructed category based on appearance differences that have been used to create hierarchies privileging some and disadvantaging others.



Figure 7.4.1: A diverse group of students from Rungta College. (CC0 1.0; Basantsatpathy via Wikimedia Commons)

Race became a socially recognized marker during European colonial expansion in the 1500s. Encounters with people who looked different prompted a hierarchy that placed lighter-skinned Europeans above darker-skinned populations. Emerging scientific fields sought to study the natural world, including human populations, often framing native peoples as less evolved. Racial distinctions largely relied on phenotypes such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. Western "scientists" used these differences as "proof" that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales (Allen, 2011). Despite the consensus that race is social, it continues

to affect people as if biologically real.

Given that race is one of the first things we notice about someone, it is important to know how race and communication relate (Allen, 2011). Discussions of race in the U.S. are challenging, partly due to concerns about language and labels. People may be frustrated by their perception that labels change too often or be afraid of using an "improper" term and being viewed as racially insensitive. However, political correctness should not inhibit meaningful dialogue or learning about differences. Understanding the communicative history of race improves competence and opens opportunities for deeper engagement.

Racial classifications in the U.S. have shifted frequently, highlighting their social construction. Currently, major racial categories include African American, Asian American, European American, Latino/a, and Native American. Although, historical census data show twenty-six different classifications in the 1900s alone (Allen, 2011). Everyday communication about race has also evolved, yet many remain hesitant to discuss it due to concerns or fears about using the wrong vocabulary.

Each major racial category can be further specified by region, country, or culture. Asian Americans, for instance, vary by language, origin, and cultural practices. While broad categories are useful for trends, they risk generalization and stereotyping. You may find that someone identifies as Chinese American or Korean American instead of Asian American. In this case, the label further highlights a person's cultural lineage. We should not assume, however, that someone identifies with their cultural lineage, as many people have more in common with their U.S. American peers than a culture that may be one or more generations removed.

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an N for Negro. Later, she referred to herself as colored because that's what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term black had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word black, and the slogan "black is beautiful" was commonly used. Brenda Allen acknowledges the newer label of African American but notes that she still prefers black. The terms colored and Negro are no longer considered appropriate because they were commonly used during a time when black people were blatantly discriminated against. Even though that history may seem far removed to some, it is not to others. Currently, the terms African American and black are frequently used, and both are considered acceptable. The phrase people of color is acceptable to many and is used to be inclusive of other racial minorities. If you are unsure what to use, you could always observe how a person refers to themselves, or you could ask for their preference. In any case, a competent communicator defers to and respects the preference of the individual.

The label Latin American generally refers to people who live in Central American countries. Although Spain colonized much of what is now South and Central America and parts of the Caribbean, the inhabitants of these areas are now much more diverse. Depending on the region or country, some people primarily trace their lineage to the indigenous people who lived in these areas before colonization, or to a Spanish and indigenous lineage, or to other combinations that may include European, African, and/or indigenous heritage. Latina and Latino are labels that are preferable to Hispanic for many who live in the U.S. and trace their lineage to South and/or Central America and/or parts of the Caribbean. Scholars who study Latina/o identity often use the label Latina/o in their writing to acknowledge women who avow that identity label (Calafell, 2007). In verbal communication, you might say "Latina" when referring to a particular female or "Latino" when referring to a particular male of Latin American heritage. When referring to the group as a whole, you could say "Latinas and Latinos" instead of just "Latinos," which would be more gender inclusive. While Hispanic is used by the U.S. Census, it refers primarily to people of Spanish origin, which does not account for the diversity of background of many Latinos/as. The term Hispanic also highlights the colonizer's influence over the indigenous, which erases a history that is important to many. Additionally, there are people who claim Spanish origins and identify culturally as Hispanic but racially as white. Labels such as Puerto Rican or Mexican American, which further specify region or country of origin, may also be used. Just as with other cultural groups, if you are unsure of how to refer to someone, you can always ask for and honor someone's preference.

U.S. immigration history also shapes racial construction. The metaphor of the melting pot has been used to describe the immigration history of the U.S., but doesn't capture the experiences of many immigrant groups (Allen, 2011). Light-skinned, English-speaking immigrants assimilated more easily, while groups now considered white, such as the Irish, faced discrimination. Italian immigrants in the South were once segregated in schools, and Asian immigrants were denied citizenship until 1952. All of this history and context are important because it continues to influence communication among races today.

Interracial Communication

Race and communication are closely connected and in many various ways. Racism shapes how we talk about race and is difficult for many to discuss. Today, racism is often seen as overt acts, such as using derogatory language or discriminating against someone. However, there is a distinction between individual racist acts and institutional racism, which operates through societal

patterns and structures and does not require personal intent. Competent communicators must recognize how racism influences communication at both individual and societal levels.

People often make assumptions about others' race based on speech, which are frequently tied to stereotypes. Dominant groups tend to define what is correct or incorrect usage of a language, and since language is so closely tied to identity, labeling a group's use of a language as incorrect or deviant challenges or negates part of their identity (Yancy, 2011). Standard English reflects white, middle-class norms and can marginalize speakers of other dialects. Differences between standard English and what has been called "Black English" have gotten national attention through debates about whether or not instruction in classrooms should accommodate students who do not speak standard English. Debates about accommodating Black English in classrooms illustrate how linguistic standards intersect with race, education, and social class. People who deviate from the standard often face negative judgments, regardless of their own language proficiency.

An additional national controversy has revolved around the inclusion of Spanish in common language use, such as Spanish as an option at ATMs, or other automated services, and Spanish language instruction in school for students who do not speak or are learning to speak English. As noted prior, the Latino/a population in the U.S. is growing fast, which has necessitated the inclusion of Spanish in many areas of public life. This has also created a backlash, which some scholars argue is tied more to the race of the immigrants than the language they speak, and a fear that white America could be engulfed by other languages and cultures (Speicher, 2002). This backlash has led to a revived movement to make English the official language of the U.S.

The U.S. Constitution does not stipulate a national language, and Congress has not designated one either. While nearly thirty states have passed English-language legislation, it has mostly been symbolic, and court rulings have limited any enforceability (Zuckerman, 2010). Interracial communication presents some additional verbal challenges.

Code-switching involves changing from one way of speaking to another between or within interactions. Some people of color may engage in code-switching when communicating with dominant group members because they fear they will be negatively judged. Adopting the language practices of the dominant group may minimize perceived differences. This code-switching creates a linguistic dual consciousness in which people can maintain their linguistic identities with their in-group peers but can still acquire tools and gain access needed to function in dominant society (Yancy, 2011). White people may also feel anxious about communicating with people of color out of fear of being perceived as racist. In other situations, people in dominant groups may spotlight nondominant members by asking them to comment on or educate others about their race (Allen, 2011).

Example 7.4.1 Burdening Nondominant Group Members

Scenario: A Black employee uses African American English (AAE) with friends but shifts to Standard English during meetings with white colleagues. Meanwhile, a white coworker avoids discussing race at all, worried they might say something offensive. During a diversity discussion, another employee turns to the Black colleague and asks them to "explain what Black people think."

Impact: The Black employee engages in code-switching to avoid negative judgments, demonstrating the pressure to adapt to dominant linguistic norms. The white coworker's silence reflects anxiety about being perceived as racist. Being positioned as a spokesperson highlights how nondominant group members are often spotlighted and burdened with educating others. These dynamics show how race, language, and power intersect in everyday communication.

Gender

When a newborn is introduced, we often ask whether it is a boy or a girl, highlighting the role of gender in organizing social life and relationships. A Canadian family became aware of the deep emotions people feel about gender and the great discomfort people feel when they cannot determine gender when they announced to the world that they were not going to tell anyone the gender of their baby, aside from the baby's siblings. Their desire for their child, named Storm, to be able to experience early life without the boundaries and categories of gender brought criticism from many (Davis & James, 2011). Conversely, many parents assign gender through clothing, colors, and other cues, demonstrating how societal meanings are attached to seemingly neutral characteristics. Like race, gender is socially constructed. While biological differences exist between those we label males and females, the social significance assigned to these differences shapes daily life and varies across cultures.

Gender differs from sex. **Gender** is an identity based on cultural notions of masculinity and femininity, internalized through socialization and expressed through interaction. **Sex** is based on biological characteristics, including external genitalia, internal

sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones (Wood, 2005). While the biological characteristics between men and women are different, it is the meaning that we create and attach to those characteristics that makes them significant. The cultural differences in how that significance is ascribed are proof that "our way of doing things" is arbitrary. For example, cross-cultural research has found that boys and girls in most cultures show both aggressive and nurturing tendencies, but cultures vary in terms of how they encourage these characteristics between genders. In a group in Africa, young boys are responsible for taking care of babies and are encouraged to be nurturing (Wood, 2005).

Over centuries, gender has been deliberately constructed to favor men. Scientific fields historically claimed "natural" differences between men and women, often in ways now recognized as sexist. Craniometry in the late 1800s suggested men's larger brains indicated superior intelligence, while psychology and sociology framed women as less evolved (Allen, 2011). Medical and political authorities cited menstrual cycles to argue women were irrational, restricting their access to education, voting, and leadership. This system, known as **patriarchy**, privileges men and often renders their gender invisible, while masculinities studies have highlighted that men also perform gender.



Figure 7.4.2: Protesters march in Buffalo in 2017 advocating for women's rights, challenging patriarchal systems that have historically privileged men and restricted women's access to education, leadership, and social power. This demonstration reflects ongoing efforts to contest gender inequality and highlight the social construction of gender roles. (CC BY 2.0; James G. Milles via Wikimedia Commons)

Gender has been constructed over the past few centuries in political and deliberate ways that have tended to favor men in terms of power. Various academic fields joined in the quest to "prove" there are "natural" differences between men and women. While the "proof" they presented was credible to many at the time, it seems blatantly sexist and inaccurate today. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, scientists who measured skulls, also known as craniometrists, claimed that men were more intelligent than women because they had larger brains. Leaders in the fast-growing fields of sociology and psychology argued that women were less evolved than men and had more in common with "children and savages" than an adult (white) males (Allen, 2011). Doctors and other decision makers like politicians also used women's menstrual cycles as evidence that they were irrational, or hysterical, and therefore could not be trusted to vote, pursue higher education, or be in a leadership position.

These are just a few of the many instances of how knowledge was created by seemingly legitimate scientific disciplines that we can now clearly see served to empower men and disempower women. This system is based on the ideology of patriarchy, which is a system of social structures and practices that maintains the values, priorities, and interests of men as a group (Wood, 2005). One of the ways patriarchy is maintained is by its relative invisibility. While women have been the focus of much research on gender differences, males have been largely unexamined. Men have been treated as the "generic" human being to which others are compared. This ignores the fact that men have a gender, too. Masculinities studies have challenged that notion by examining how masculinities are performed.

There have been challenges to the construction of gender in recent decades. Since the 1960s, scholars and activists have challenged established notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. The women's rights movement in the U.S. dates back to the 1800s, when the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Wood, 2005). Although most women's rights movements have been led by white, middle-class women, there was overlap between those involved in the abolitionist movement to end slavery and the beginnings of the women's rights movement. Although some of the leaders of the

early women's rights movement had class and education privilege, they were still taking a risk by organizing and protesting. Black women were even more at risk, and Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave, faced those risks often and gave a much noted extemporaneous speech at a women's rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, which came to be called "Ain't I a Woman?" (Wood, 2005).

Feminism as an intellectual and social movement advanced women's rights and our overall understanding of gender. Feminism has received a bad reputation based on how it has been portrayed in the media and by some politicians. It is important to remember that there are many ways to be a feminist and to realize that some of the stereotypes about feminism are rooted in sexism and homophobia, in that feminists are reduced to "men haters" and often presumed to be lesbians. The feminist movement also gave some momentum to the transgender rights movement. **Transgender** is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression do not match the gender they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may or may not seek medical intervention like surgery or hormone treatments to help match their physiology with their gender identity. As with other groups, it is best to allow someone to self-identify first and then honor their preferred label. If you are unsure of which pronouns to use when addressing someone, you can use gender-neutral language.

Gender as a cultural identity has implications for many aspects of our lives, including real-world contexts like education and work. Schools are primary grounds for socialization, and the educational experience for males and females is different in many ways from preschool through college. Although not always intentional, schools tend to recreate the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in society. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, there are communicative elements present in school that support this (Allen, 2011). For example, teachers are more likely to call on and pay attention to boys in a classroom, giving them more feedback in the form of criticism, praise, and help. This sends an implicit message that boys are more worthy of attention and more valuable than girls. Teachers are also more likely to lead girls to focus on feelings and appearance, and boys to focus on competition and achievement. The focus on appearance for girls can lead to anxieties about body image. Gender inequalities are also evident in the administrative structure of schools, which puts males in positions of authority more than females. These inequalities in schools correspond to larger inequalities in the general workforce. While there are more women in the workforce now than ever before, they still face a glass ceiling, which is a barrier to promotion to upper management.

Sexuality

While race and gender are two of the first things we notice about others, sexuality is often something we view as personal and private. Although many people hold the view that a person's sexuality should be kept private, this is not a reality for our society. One only needs to observe popular culture and media for a short time to see that sexuality permeates much of our public discourse.

Sexuality relates to culture and identity in important ways that extend beyond sexual orientation, just as race is more than the color of one's skin and gender is more than one's biological and physiological manifestations of masculinity and femininity. Sexuality is not just physical; it is social in that we communicate with others about sexuality (Allen, 2011). Sexuality is also biological in that it connects to physiological functions that carry significant social and political meaning like puberty, menstruation, and pregnancy. Sexuality connects to public health issues like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. Sexuality is at the center of political issues like abortion, sex education, and LGBTQIA+ rights. While all these contribute to sexuality as a cultural identity, the focus in this section is on sexual orientation.



Figure 7.4.3: In 2023, the MTA announced commemorative decals and MetroCards systemwide, reflecting how sexuality is both a personal and cultural identity, shaped by social, biological, and political factors, and highlighting ongoing efforts to communicate, affirm, and advocate for sexual diversity and rights. (CC BY 2.0; MTAPhotos via Wikimedia Commons)

The most obvious way sexuality relates to identity is through sexual orientation. **Sexual orientation** refers to a person's primary physical and emotional sexual attraction and activity. The terms we most often use to categorize sexual orientation are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are sometimes referred to as sexual minorities. While the term sexual preference has been used previously, sexual orientation is more appropriate, since preference implies a simple choice. Although someone's preference for a restaurant or actor may change frequently, sexuality is not as simple. The term homosexual can be appropriate in some instances, but it carries with it a clinical and medicalized tone. The medical community has a recent history of "treating homosexuality" with means that most would view as inhumane today. So, many people prefer a term like gay, which was chosen and embraced by gay people, rather than homosexual, which was imposed by a then discriminatory medical system.

The gay and lesbian rights movement became widely recognizable in the U.S. in the 1950s and continues on today, evident by prominent issues regarding sexual orientation in national news and politics. National and international groups like the Human Rights Campaign advocate for rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities. While these communities are often grouped together, they remain different. Gays and lesbians constitute the most visible of the groups and receive the most attention and funding. Bisexuals are rarely visible or included in popular cultural discourses or in social and political movements. Transgender issues have received much more attention in recent years, but transgender identity connects to gender more than it does to sexuality. Lastly, **queer** is a term used to describe a group that is diverse in terms of identities but usually takes a more activist, and at times, radical stance that critiques sexual categories. While queer was long considered a derogatory label, and still is by some, the queer activist movement that emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s reclaimed the word and embraced it as a positive. As shown, there is a diversity of identities among sexual minorities, just as there is variation within races and genders.

As with other cultural identities, notions of sexuality have been socially constructed in different ways throughout human history. Sexual orientation did not come into being as an identity category until the late 1800s. Before that, sexuality was viewed in more physical or spiritual senses that were largely separate from a person's identity.

Ability

There is resistance to classifying ability as a cultural identity, because we follow a medical model of disability that places disability as an individual and medical, rather than social and cultural, issue. While much of what distinguishes able-bodied and cognitively able from disabled, is rooted in science, biology, and physiology, there are important sociocultural dimensions. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a **disability** as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Allen, 2011). An **impairment** is defined as "any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological" (Allen, 2011). This definition is important because it notes the social aspect of disability in that people's life activities are limited and the relational aspect of

disability in that the perception of a disability by others can lead someone to be classified as such. Ascribing an identity of disabled to a person can be problematic. If there is a mental or physical impairment, it should be diagnosed by a credentialed expert. If there is not an impairment, then the label of disabled can have negative impacts, as this label carries social and cultural significance. People are tracked into various educational programs based on their physical and cognitive abilities, and there are many cases of people being mistakenly labeled disabled who were treated differently despite their protest of the ascribed label. Students who did not speak English as a first language, for example, were, and perhaps still are, sometimes put into special education classes.



Figure 7.4.4: Protesters gather to advocate for disability rights, specifically Deaf rights, highlighting the social and cultural dimensions of ability. This image reflects how disability extends beyond medical definitions, emphasizing the importance of recognizing systemic barriers, challenging ableism, and supporting equitable access and inclusion for people with diverse abilities. (CC BY 2.0; Sinn Féin via Wikimedia Commons)

Ability, just as the other cultural identities discussed, has institutionalized privileges and disadvantages associated with it. **Ableism** is the system of beliefs and practices that produces a physical and mental standard that is projected as normal for a human being and labels deviations from it as abnormal, resulting in unequal treatment and access to resources. **Ability privilege** refers to the unearned advantages that are provided for people who fit the cognitive and physical norms (Allen, 2011). Unlike other cultural identities that are typically stable over a lifetime, ability fluctuates for most people. Many may, or have, experienced times when we are more or less able. Perhaps you broke your leg and had to use crutches or a wheelchair for a while. Getting sick for a prolonged period of time also lessens our abilities, but we may fully recover from any of these examples and regain our ability privilege. Whether you have experienced a short-term disability or not, the majority of us will become less physically and cognitively able as we get older.

Statistically, people with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the U.S., with an estimated 20 percent of people five years or older living with some form of disability (Allen, 2011). Medical advances have allowed some people with disabilities to live longer and more active lives than before, which has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. This number continues to increase as during various periods, veterans returning from wars may return with physical disabilities or psychological impairments such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

As disability has been constructed in U.S. history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to “political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm,” framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the “scientific” category of “feeblemindedness,” which led them to be institutionalized (Carlson, 2001). Arguments supporting racial inequality and tighter immigration restrictions also drew on notions of disability, framing certain racial groups as prone to cognitive disabilities, mental illness, or uncontrollable emotions and actions.

During the early 1900s, the eugenics movement was the epitome of the move to rehabilitate or reject people with disabilities (Allen, 2005). This was a brand of social engineering that was indicative of a strong public support in the rationality of science to cure society’s problems (Allen, 2011). A sterilization law written in 1914 “proposed to authorize sterilization of the socially inadequate,” which included the “feebleminded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, and

dependent" (Lombardo, 2011). Although the eugenics movement as it was envisioned and enacted then is unthinkable today, some who have studied the eugenics movement of the early 1900s have issued warnings that a newly packaged version of eugenics could be upon us. As human genome mapping and DNA manipulation become more accessible, advanced genetic testing could enable parents to eliminate undesirable aspects or enhance desirable characteristics of their children before they are born, creating "designer children" (Spice, 2005).

Much has changed for people with disabilities in the U.S. in the past fifty years. The independent living movement (ILM) was a part of the disability rights movement that took shape along with other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The ILM calls for more individual and collective action toward social change by people with disabilities. Some of the goals of the ILM include reframing disability as a social and political rather than just a medical issue, a shift toward changing society rather than just rehabilitating people with disabilities, a view of accommodations as civil rights rather than charity, and more involvement by people with disabilities in the formulation and execution of policies relating to them (Longmore, 2003). As society better adapts to people with disabilities, there will be more instances of interability communication taking place.

Interability communication is communication between people with differing ability levels. For example, a hearing person communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or a person who does not use a wheelchair communicating with someone who uses a wheelchair.

Across race, gender, sexuality, and ability, we see a common pattern: identities are shaped by social meanings, reinforced through institutions, and expressed through communication. The labels we adopt or reject, the accommodations we make or resist, and the norms we treat as "normal" all reflect cultural assumptions about whose bodies, relationships, and ways of being are valued. Understanding identity as socially constructed does not make it less real in its consequences. Instead, it helps us see how communication can either reinforce limiting categories or open space for more inclusive understandings.

Power and the Cross Sections of Identity Categories

Identity categories do not operate independently; they intersect within systems of power. A person's experience of gender, for example, is shaped by race, class, sexuality, and ability. These intersections influence access to resources, safety, representation, and credibility. Communication is a primary site where these power dynamics are enacted, through media portrayals, institutional policies, everyday language, and interpersonal interaction. At the same time, communication is also a tool for resistance, as marginalized groups challenge stereotypes, demand recognition, and reshape dominant narratives. Examining identity through an intersectional lens highlights that privilege and disadvantage are not evenly distributed but layered and context-dependent.

Key Takeaways

- Identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and ability are socially constructed through historical, political, and communicative processes.
- Communication shapes identity by creating meanings, labels, norms, and expectations attached to social categories.
- Race, gender, sexuality, and ability have been used to justify unequal power structures, even though they lack fixed biological foundations as social hierarchies.
- Language practices, representation, and everyday interaction reinforce or challenge dominant norms about identity.
- Identity categories intersect, meaning people experience privilege and disadvantage in layered and context-specific ways.

Attributions

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7.5: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

Communication does not happen in isolation: it is shaped by culture, identity, and power. Culture provides the shared meanings, values, and norms that guide how we interact, while power influences who has access to resources, credibility, and voice in a given context. Understanding communication requires attention to both these structural elements and the interpersonal ways in which people exercise influence, whether through authority, expertise, persuasion, or social relationships. By examining the connections between communication, culture, and power, we gain insight into why certain voices dominate, why some messages are persuasive, and why misunderstandings occur across different social groups.

Identity is central to communication because it reflects how individuals see themselves and how they are recognized by others. Identities are layered, including personal traits, social group memberships, and cultural affiliations, and they shift in salience depending on context. People may emphasize different aspects of their identity depending on the situation, the audience, or the social role they occupy. Understanding identity as dynamic rather than fixed allows communicators to navigate interactions with greater sensitivity, anticipating how differences in identity can influence perspectives, expectations, and relational dynamics.

Dominant and nondominant identity development further shapes how people perceive privilege and oppression. Nondominant individuals may experience stages of conformity, resistance, and integration as they navigate societal expectations, while dominant individuals move through awareness, resistance, redefinition, and integration of their privilege. Recognizing these developmental patterns helps explain why people respond differently to discussions of difference, power, and social justice. It also highlights the importance of empathy and patience when engaging in conversations about inequality or cultural differences.

Race, gender, sexuality, and ability illustrate the ways identities are socially constructed and historically contingent. These categories are not fixed biological realities but rather are shaped through laws, social institutions, media, and everyday communication. Language, labels, and representations reinforce social hierarchies, creating both privilege and disadvantage. Understanding the historical and social construction of these identities is critical for competent communication, as it allows individuals to challenge stereotypes, reduce bias, and engage in more inclusive practices.

Finally, communication is both a site where power and identity are enacted and a tool for resistance and change. Individuals and groups can use communication to challenge dominant norms, educate others, and advocate for equity. Intersecting identities create layered experiences of privilege and disadvantage, meaning that effective communication requires awareness of context, history, and the ways identities interact. By examining the intersections of culture, identity, and power, communicators can develop competence that not only fosters understanding but also promotes justice, inclusivity, and meaningful connection.

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7.7: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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7.7.1: Exercises

6.1: Principles of Power

1. Students are given a scenario (e.g., group project, workplace meeting, family discussion) and asked to identify: Who holds power and why (structural, relational, or perceived). How power shifts depending on context, dependence, or investment. Potential communication strategies for those with less power to influence outcomes ethically.
2. Students individually write a short reflection identifying one way they experience social privilege and one way they experience social disadvantage in communication contexts. How does privilege affect what they can say, where, and with whom? How does disadvantage shape their communication choices or risks?
3. In pairs or small groups, students role-play a scenario where power is unequal (e.g., supervisor/employee, senior student/new student, landlord/tenant). One student plays the higher-power role and one plays the lower-power role. Each tries to communicate effectively while navigating power dynamics and ethical considerations. Debrief as a class: What behaviors signaled power? How did perception vs. reality affect communication?

6.2: Individual and Persuasive Power

1. Students are given multiple everyday scenarios (classroom, workplace, social group) and asked to: Identify which type(s) of individual power is being used (coercive, reward, legitimate, referent, expert, informational). Explain how the power affects communication choices and outcomes.
2. Students create a short persuasive message on a relevant topic (e.g., campus initiative, team project idea, social cause) using ethos, logos, and pathos. Identify how they establish credibility (ethos). Present logical evidence or reasoning (logos). Include an emotional appeal (pathos).
3. In pairs or small groups, students role-play a situation where one person holds power and the other does not (e.g., manager/employee, senior/junior student). Students explore how the person with less power can communicate assertively without violating social norms. Debrief by discussing how coercive, reward, or referent power could influence outcomes.

6.3: Foundations of Culture and Identity

1. Students create a visual map of their personal, social, and cultural identities. They should identify which identities are most salient in different contexts (home, school, work, social groups).
2. Students reflect on an identity they hold that could be considered dominant or nondominant in a given context. For each, they: Identify the stage of identity development they believe they are in. Describe how this identity affects communication, decision-making, or relationships.
3. Students are given a scenario where cultural or social identity differences may influence communication (e.g., a team meeting with diverse participants, a community service project). Students role-play the scenario and: Identify potential misunderstandings or conflicts. Practice mindful, inclusive communication strategies.

6.4: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

1. Students create a timeline for one of their identities (race, gender, sexuality, or ability) showing how their understanding of that identity has changed over time. They should note key events, social influences, or personal experiences that shaped their identity development.
2. Students identify specific ways they communicate their identities in different contexts (e.g., family, school, work, social media). They should analyze: Instances where their identity is highlighted, assumed, or challenged. Moments where they code-switch, adapt, or face miscommunication due to identity differences.
3. Students are given a scenario involving multiple identities intersecting (e.g., a Latina woman with a disability applying for a job). They analyze: How her race, gender, and ability influence how she is perceived. What communication challenges or biases may arise. Strategies for more equitable and inclusive communication.

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7.7.2: Discussion Questions

6.1: Principles of Power

1. Think of a situation where someone's perceived power was different from their actual power. How did that perception influence communication choices for both parties?
2. How does your power in one relationship or environment change in another? Can you provide examples where you felt more or less powerful and how that affected your communication?
3. Power often produces invisible privilege. How can recognizing your own privilege influence the way you communicate, particularly in creating space for marginalized voices?

6.2: Individual and Persuasive Power

1. Think about a time when someone influenced you using one of the six types of individual power. Which type was it, and how did it affect your behavior or decisions?
2. How can persuasive power (ethos, logos, pathos) be used responsibly? Can you think of examples where persuasion was effective but potentially unethical?
3. Even without formal authority, people can influence others. What strategies can you use to persuade or lead in situations where you have little structural power?

6.3: Foundations of Culture and Identity

1. Think of a time when one of your identities (personal, social, or cultural) became particularly salient. How did this influence what you said, how you listened, or the people you interacted with?
2. How might dominant and nondominant identities shape who speaks, who is believed, or who is interrupted in a group setting? What strategies can communicators use to address these imbalances?
3. Why is understanding difference important in communication? How can acknowledging cultural and social differences improve collaboration, reduce conflict, or foster equity?

6.4: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

1. How does understanding identity as socially constructed, rather than biologically fixed, change the way we think about communication, social norms, or inequality?
2. What role does language play in constructing and expressing identity? How do practices like code-switching, pronoun use, or labeling affect interactions across identity groups?
3. Consider a time when multiple aspects of your identity (or someone else's) intersected in a social or institutional setting. How did these intersections influence communication, privilege, or disadvantage?

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8: FOUNDATIONS OF GROUP COMMUNICATION

Overview

Group communication is a vital skill because much of what we do at work, school and in our personal lives requires us to interact and collaborate with others. Studying how groups work helps us understand why some groups thrive while others struggle. Groups offer many advantages, such as bringing together different perspectives, generating creative solutions, and distributing tasks among members. At the same time, groups can face disadvantages, including conflicts, lack of focus, or uneven participation. Understanding group communication allows individuals to maximize the benefits while reducing the challenges.

This chapter provides an overview of the nature of groups and explains how they function in various contexts. You will also learn about the stages of group development, from formation to completion, and how members take on roles that shape the group. These roles can involve leading, supporting, or challenging others, and they influence how well the group operates.

Finally, we will cover how verbal and nonverbal communication contribute to building understanding, maintaining relationships, and managing conflict. Listening is especially critical, as it ensures members feel heard and valued while fostering trust and cooperation. By studying these elements, students will gain the tools to become more effective group members and leaders, prepared to navigate collaboration in academic, professional, and everyday settings.

Chapter Goals

- Explain why group communication is essential in educational, professional, and personal contexts.
- Identify the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups and how they influence group outcomes.
- Describe the stages of group development and the roles members play in shaping group effectiveness.
- Analyze how verbal and nonverbal communication contribute to understanding, relationship-building, and conflict management within groups.
- Demonstrate effective listening strategies that foster trust, cooperation, and collaboration among group members.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Active Listening
- Adjourning Stage
- Chronemics
- Closure Stage
- Conflict Stage
- Connotative Meaning
- Consensus Stage
- Denotative Meaning
- Divergent Member
- Doublespeak
- Environment
- Euphemism
- Forming Stage
- Full Members
- Group
- Group Communication
- Group Norms

- Group Socialization
- Groupthink
- Haptics
- Jargon
- Kinesics
- Marginal Member
- Microgroup
- Nonverbal Communication
- Norming Stage
- Orientation Stage
- Paralanguage
- Performing Stage
- Primary Groups
- Proxemics
- Relationships
- Secondary Groups
- Slang
- Social Loafing
- Space
- Storming Stage
- Synergy

8.1: Introducing Group Communication

8.2: The Nature of Groups

8.3: Understanding Group Communication

8.4: Nonverbal Communication in Groups

8.5: Listening in Groups

8.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

8.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 8

8.8: References

8.9: Teacher Resources

8.9.1: Exercises

8.9.2: Discussion Questions

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8.1: Introducing Group Communication

Communication Is Key to Success

Communication is key to your success, in relationships, in the workplace, in your community, and across your lifetime. Your ability to communicate comes from experience, which can be an effective teacher. However, this chapter on group communication will offer you a wealth of experiences gathered from professionals across their lifetimes. “Group communication is a dynamic process where a small number of people engage in a conversation” (McLean, 2005, p.14). Group communication is generally defined as involving three to eight people. The larger the group, the more likely it is to break down into smaller groups.

You will learn here from experts in the field how to be a more effective team and group communicator. According to Ken Boughrum and Tyler Durham of Stromberg Consulting, “Great teams are distinguished from good teams by how effectively they communicate. Great team communication is more than the words that are said or written. Power is leveraged by the team’s ability to actively listen, clarify, understand, and live by the principle that “everything communicates.” The actions, the tone, the gestures, the infrastructure, the environment, and the things that are not done or said speak and inform just as loudly as words. (O’Rourke & Yarbrough, 2008). Effective teams and groups start with effective communication.

Group Communication Skills Are Desired in the Workplace

Teams and groups are almost universal across all fields because no one has all the skills, knowledge, or ability to do everything with an equal degree of excellence. Employees work with each other in manufacturing and service industries on a daily basis. An individual with excellent communication skills is an asset to every organization. No matter what career you plan to pursue, learning to interact, contribute, and excel in groups and teams will help you get there. For instance, the work team pictured in Figure 8.1.1 pools their experience and skills to collaborate on a project at a conference.

As you study group communication, you may receive suggestions for improvement and clarification from professionals more experienced than yourself. Take their suggestions as challenges to improve. Your success in communicating is a skill that applies to almost every field of work, and it makes a difference in your relationships with others. You want to be prepared to communicate well when given the opportunity. Each time you do a good job, your success will bring more success. At times in your career, you will represent your business or company in teams and groups, and your professionalism and attention to detail will reflect well on you and set you up for success. Positive improvements in these skills will have a positive impact on your relationships, your prospects for employment, and your ability to make a difference in the world.



Figure 8.1.1: Working as a team means more varied perspectives and skills that will help the group achieve its goals. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Filipinayzd via Wikimedia Commons)

Group Communication Can Be Challenging

Many variables can make group communication challenging, such as differences in culture, native language, and worldview. What you perceive as you communicate with others is influenced by these issues and more. As the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas said, “Every process of reaching understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained preunderstanding.” (Habermas, 1989).

Example 8.1.1 What Time Is "On Time?"

You may have certain expectations of time and punctuality. You weren’t born with them, so where did you learn them? From those around you as you grew up. You learned from your family or the group of people who raised you. What was normal for them became normal for you, but not everyone’s idea of normal is the same. When your supervisor invites you to a meeting and says it will start at 7 p.m., does that mean 7:00 sharp, 7-ish, or even 7:30? In a business context, when a meeting is scheduled to start at 9 a.m., is it promptly at 9 a.m.? Variations in time expectations depend on regional and national culture as well as individual corporate cultures. In some companies, everyone may be expected to arrive 10-15 minutes before the announced start time to take their seats and be ready to commence business at 9:00 sharp. In other companies, “meeting and greeting” from about 9 to 9:05 or even 9:10 is the norm. When you are unfamiliar with the expectations for a business event, it is always wise to err on the side of being punctual, regardless of what your own internal assumptions about time and punctuality may be.

Understanding how to work with people from different backgrounds with different perspectives in a group can be difficult at times, but there's a reason why groups and teams have become so prevalent in the classroom as well as in the conference room. Committed people with the skill set and understanding working together to accomplish the same goal can often go so much farther and faster than the individual. But because of the complexity of group communication, understanding the components and how they work together can be invaluable to becoming an effective group member.

Four Consequences of Group Communication

The mere fact that groups include multiple people leads to at least four consequences. Whether these consequences prove to be advantageous or not depends on the skill level and knowledge of a group’s members.

First, not everyone in a group can talk at the same time (at least, not if they intend to understand and be understood by each other). However, informally, members have to seek permission to speak. They need to decide how to take turns. In this respect, a group is inherently more formal than a single individual or a dyad.

Second, members of a group have to share time. The larger the group, the less average time per person is available, and the fewer opportunities each member will likely have to contribute to discussions.

Third, communication in groups is generally less intimate than in interpersonal settings. Because there are so many personalities and levels of relationship to consider, people in groups are less inclined to share personal details or express controversial views.

Finally, group work is more time-consuming than individual or interpersonal effort. Why? For one thing, group members usually try to let everyone share information and views. Also, the more people involved in a discussion, the more diverse opinions may need to be considered and allowed to compete.

As we’ve noted earlier, groups apply themselves toward reaching aims and accomplishing things. In addition to this task-oriented characteristic, however, they include and depend upon relationships among their members. Although these two elements are usually intertwined rather than discrete and separate, an overview of the pluses and minuses of each can help you make the most of your experience in a group.

Relationship Advantages

The columnist David Brooks interpreted research as indicating that human beings are “wired to cooperate and collaborate, just as much as we are to compete.” (Galanes & Adams, 2023). What’s in it for you in terms of relationships, then, if you work in a group instead of alone? Working in a group can satisfy a number of important human needs.

- You may enjoy fellowship and companionship.
- You may receive moral and emotional support for your views and objectives.
- You may meet three important needs: inclusion, affection, and control (Galanes & Adams, 2023).
- You may have your impulsiveness curbed or your reticence challenged.
- You may cultivate ties that yield future personal or career advantages.

These female college students are smiling and laughing for the camera as they work on a service project together. Though the work may not be inherently enjoyable or familiar, working together can make it fun and even be a bonding experience for the group members.



Figure 8.1.2: These college students are in the middle of what could be an unpleasant task. But due to group cohesion, they are making it fun. (CC BY 2.0; Nazareth College from Rochester, NY, USA via Wikimedia Commons)

Relationship Disadvantages

Despite the advantages it offers, working in groups almost invariably presents challenges and disadvantages in the realm of relationships.

- It will probably take a lot of time to create, maintain, and repair the human relationships involved in a group.
- Your group may generate conflict, which hurts people's feelings and otherwise undermines their relationships.
- You may misunderstand other group members' intentions or messages.
- Some group members may attempt to deceive, manipulate, or betray the trust of other members.

Task Advantages

Anthropologists have asserted that a major feature of mainstream culture in the United States is a relentless pressure to do things, to accomplish things. Tom Peters is credited with first calling this cultural feature "a bias for action." One of the best-selling business self-help books reinforced this national passion for dynamic behavior. Its title is *A Bias for Action: How Effective Managers Harness Their Willpower, Achieve Results, and Stop Wasting Time* (Bruch & Ghoshal, 2004). Without a doubt, accomplishing tasks constitutes a central purpose of most human behavior in the modern world.

Groups Can Provide Benefits

- The group will most likely have access to much more information than any member possesses.
- The group can focus multiple attentions and diverse energy on a topic.

- The group may be more thorough in dealing with a topic than any individual might be. This thoroughness may arise simply because of the number of perspectives represented in the group, but it also owes to the fact that members often "propel each other's thinking" (Wood, 1997).
- The group may harness and exploit conflict to generate new and better ideas than an individual could. When tension and disagreement are resolved constructively, the chances of achieving group goals increase.
- The group may attain a deeper understanding of topics. One analysis of studies, for instance, indicated that students in group-based learning environments learned more and remembered more of what they learned than did counterparts exposed to more traditional methods (Johnson et al., 1998).
- The group can provide **synergy** which is a combined effect greater than the simple sum total of individual contributions. Sometimes synergy results through enhanced creativity as group members share and build upon each other's strengths and perspectives. You can probably think of examples of an athletic squad or business group comprised of members with modest individual strengths that performed superlatively together.

You can even find use for groups in your leisure time. For instance, this group of volunteers works together to better serve the visitors to Yellowstone.



Figure 8.1.3: These five Yellowstone fly fishing volunteers make the group stronger by each bringing their own experience and skill to the job. (Public Domain; YellowstoneNPS via Wikimedia Commons)

Task Disadvantages

Groups aren't always successful at reaching their goals. You've probably experienced many situations in which you became frustrated or angry because a group you were part of seemed to be taking two steps backward for every step forward—or perhaps you felt it was going only backward. Here are some features of group work that distinguish it in a potentially negative way from what you might be able to accomplish by yourself or with a single partner:

Groups Can Be Time-Consuming

- In order to be successful, groups need broad, ongoing, time-consuming exchanges of messages. They need to invest in coordinating and monitoring what they're doing. With people as busy as they are in the twenty-first century, "out of sight" is indeed often "out of mind." If they don't keep in touch frequently, group members may forget what they've most recently discussed or decided as a group. They also run the risk of losing track of the structures and processes they've put in place to help them move toward their goals.

- Some group members may engage in "**social loafing**." When one or two people are assigned a task, they know they're being watched and are apt to shoulder the burden. In a larger group, however, any given member will feel less personally responsible for what takes place in it. If too many members follow the natural tendency to observe rather than act, a group may lose its efficiency and thereby find it much more difficult to reach its aims.
- Groupthink, which doesn't allow conflict of ideas, may sap the creative potential of the members. Too much diversity in outlooks and work styles may act as a barrier to a group, but too little diversity also represents a threat to success. If they too easily adopt and hold onto one viewpoint or course of action, people may fall prey to two dangers. First, they may overlook flaws in their thinking. Second, they may fail to anticipate dangers that they might have detected with closer scrutiny and longer reflection.

For each task you want to accomplish, consider whether the benefits of a group outweigh the drawbacks.

Key Takeaways

- Effective group communication is essential for success in relationships, workplaces, communities, and throughout your lifetime.
- Great teams thrive through active listening, clarity, understanding, and recognizing that actions communicate just as much, if not more than, words. Groups take more time and structure since everyone needs a turn to talk and be heard.
- Working in groups builds friendships and support, but it can also create conflicts or misunderstandings.
- Groups spark more ideas and creativity, but they can slow down if members don't contribute equally.

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8.2: The Nature of Groups

What Is a Group?

We form self-identities through our communication with others, and much of that interaction occurs in a group context. A **group** may be defined as three or more individuals who affiliate, interact, or cooperate in a familial, social, or work context. **Group communication** may be defined as the exchange of information with those who are alike culturally, linguistically, and/or geographically. Group members may be known by their symbols, such as patches and insignia on a military uniform. They may be known by their use of specialized language or jargon; for example, someone in information technology may use the term “server” in reference to the internet, whereas someone in the foodservice industry may use “server” to refer to the worker who takes customer orders in a restaurant. Group members may also be known by their proximity, as in gated communities. Regardless of how the group defines itself, and regardless of the extent to which its borders are porous or permeable, a group recognizes itself as a group. Humans naturally make groups a part of their context or environment.

> Andrew Carnegie (as cited in University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2015) stated, "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

As humans, we are social beings. We naturally form relationships with others. In fact, relationships are often noted as one of the most important aspects of a person’s life, and they exist in many forms. Interpersonal communication occurs between two people, but group communication may involve two or more individuals. Groups are a primary context for interaction within the business community. Groups may have heroes and enemies, sages alongside new members. Groups overlap and may share common goals, but may also engage in conflict. Groups can be supportive or coercive and can exert powerful influences over individuals.

Within a group, individuals may behave in distinct ways, use unique or specialized terms, or display symbols that have meaning to that group. Those same terms or symbols may be confusing, meaningless, or even unacceptable to another group. An individual may belong to both groups, adapting their communication patterns to meet group normative expectations. Groups are increasingly important across social media venues, and there are many examples of successful business ventures on the web that value and promote group interaction.

Groups use words to exchange meaning, establish territory, and identify who is a stranger versus who is a trusted member. Are you familiar with the term “troll”? It is often used to identify someone who is not a member of an online group or community, who does not share the group's values and beliefs, and who posts a message on an online discussion board to initiate flame wars, cause disruption, or otherwise challenge group members. Members often use words to respond to the challenge that are not otherwise common in the discussions, and the less-than-flattering descriptions of the troll are a rallying point.



Figure 8.2.1: Smiling faces of group members sitting around a table as they talk reflect the positive experience. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Isa Haddow-Flood, Africa Centre via Wikimedia Commons)

Types of Groups in the Workplace

As a skilled communicator, learning more about groups, group dynamics, management, and leadership will serve you well. Mergers, forced sales, downsizing, and entering new markets all call upon individuals within a business or organization to become members of groups. Groups may be defined by function. They can also be defined, from a developmental viewpoint, by the relationships within them. Groups can also be discussed in terms of their relationship to the individual and the degree to which they meet interpersonal needs.

Some groups, such as the group pictured in Figure 8.2.1, come together to better understand one another. Others may be assembled at work to solve problems, and once the challenge has been resolved, they dissolve into previous or yet to be determined groups. Functional groups like this may be immediately familiar to you. You take a class in sociology from a professor of sociology, who is a member of the discipline of sociology. To be a member of a discipline is to be a disciple and adhere to a common framework for viewing the world. Disciplines involve a common set of theories that explain the world around us, terms to explain those theories, and have grown to reflect the advances of human knowledge. Compared to your sociology instructor, your physics instructor may see the world from a completely different perspective. Still, both may be members of divisions or schools, dedicated to teaching or research, and come together under the large group heading we know as the university. In business, we may have marketing experts who are members of the marketing department, who perceive their tasks differently from a member of the sales staff or someone in accounting.

Relationships are part of any group, and can be described in terms of status, power, control, as well as role, function, or viewpoint. Within a family, for example, the ties that bind you together may be common experiences, collaborative efforts, and even pain and suffering. The birth process may forge a relationship between mother and daughter, but it also may not. An adoption may transform a family. Relationships are formed through communication and interaction across time, and often share a common history, values, and beliefs about the world around us.

In business, an idea may bring professionals together, and they may even refer to the new product or service as their “baby,” speaking in reverent tones about a project they have taken from the drawing board and “birthed” into the real world. As in family communication, workgroups or teams may have challenges, rivalries, and even “birthing pains” as a product is adjusted, adapted, and transformed. Struggles are a part of relationships, both in families and business, and form a common history of shared challenges overcome through effort and hard work.

Through conversations and a shared sense that you and your co-workers belong together, you meet many of your basic human needs, such as the need to feel included, the need for affection, and the need for control. (Schutz, 1966). In a work context, “affection” may sound odd, but we all experience affection at work in the form of friendly comments like “good morning,” “have a nice weekend,” and “good job!” Our professional lives also fulfill more basic needs such as air, food, and water, as well as safety.

While your workgroup may be gathered together with common goals, such as to arrange beverages and food for a long project meeting, your daily interactions may well go beyond this functional perspective.

In the same way, your family may provide a place for you at the table and meet your basic needs, but they also may not meet other needs. If you grow to understand yourself and your place in a way that challenges group norms, you will be able to choose which parts of your life to share and to withhold in different groups, and to choose where to seek acceptance, affection, and control.

Primary and Secondary Groups

There are fundamentally two types of groups that can be observed in many contexts, from church to school, from family to work: primary and secondary groups. The hierarchy denotes the degree to which the group(s) meet your interpersonal needs. **Primary groups** meet most, if not all, of one's needs. Groups that meet some, but not all, needs are called secondary groups. **Secondary groups** often include work groups, where the goal is to complete a task or solve a problem. If you are a member of the sales department, your purpose is to sell.

In terms of problem-solving, work groups can accomplish more than individuals. People, each of whom has specialized skills, talents, experience, or education, come together in new combinations with new challenges, find new perspectives to create unique approaches that they themselves would not have formulated alone.

Secondary groups may meet your need for professional acceptance and celebrate your success, but may not meet your need for understanding and sharing on a personal level. Family members may understand you in ways that your co-workers cannot, and vice versa.

How Big Is Too Big?

This old cliché refers to the human tendency to form pairs. Pairing is the most basic form of relationship formation; it applies to childhood "best friends," college roommates, romantic couples, business partners, and many other dyads (two-person relationships). A group, by definition, includes at least three people. We can categorize groups in terms of their size and complexity.

The larger the group grows, the more likely it is to subdivide. Analysis of these smaller, or microgroups, is increasingly a point of study as the internet allows individuals to join people of similar mind or habit to share across time and distance. A **microgroup** is a small, independent group that has a link, affiliation, or association with a larger group. With each additional group member, the number of possible interactions increases. (McLean, 2002).

In Table 8.2.1, you can quickly see how the number of possible interactions grows according to how many people are in the group. At some point, we all find the possible and actual interactions overwhelming and subdivide into smaller groups. Forums may have hundreds or thousands of members, and you may have hundreds of friends on your social media, but how many do you regularly communicate with?

Table 8.2.1: Possible Interactions in Groups

Number of Group Members	Number of Possible Interactions
2	2
3	9
4	28
5	75
6	186
7	441
8	1,056

Small groups normally contain between three and eight people. One person may involve intrapersonal communication, while two may constitute interpersonal communication, and both may be present within a group communication context. You may think to yourself before taking a speech turn or writing your next post, and you may turn to your neighbor or co-worker and have a side

conversation, but a group relationship normally involves three to eight people.

If there are more than eight members, it becomes a challenge to have equal participation, where everyone has a chance to speak, be heard, listen, and respond. Some will dominate, others will recede, and smaller groups will form. Finding a natural balance within a group can also be a challenge. Small groups need to have enough members to generate a rich and stimulating exchange of ideas, information, and interaction, but not so many people that what each brings cannot be shared (McLean, 2015).



Figure 8.2.2: This group of twelve is bordering on too large. Will everyone be able to fully participate in the discussion? (CC BY 2.0; George Miller via Wikimedia Commons)

With this large group pictured above there's a good chance that some members will not share their ideas or feedback either because of time limits or because they are uncomfortable sharing their ideas with such a large group. One way to address this issue is to break into smaller discussion groups at some point, as pictured below. These smaller "breakout" groups can then bring the highlights of their discussion back to the large group.



Figure 8.2.3: A portion of the larger group breaks out into smaller discussion groups to enhance member participation and to be more productive. (CC BY 2.0; George Miller via Wikimedia Commons)

Group Life Cycle Patterns

Groups are dynamic systems in constant change. Groups grow together and eventually come apart. People join groups and others leave. This dynamic changes and transforms the very nature of the group. **Group socialization** involves how the group members interact with one another and form relationships. Just as you were once born, and changed your family, they changed you. You came to know a language and culture, a value system, and a set of beliefs that influence you to this day. You came to be socialized, to experience the process of learning to associate, communicate, or interact within a group. A group you belong to this year—perhaps a soccer team or the cast of a play—may not be part of your life next year. And those who are in leadership positions may ascend or descend the leadership hierarchy as the needs of the group, and other circumstances, change over time.

Groups experience similar steps and stages and take on many of the characteristics we associate with life (McLean, 2015). They grow, overcome illness and dysfunction, and transform across time. No group, just as no individual, lives forever.

Your first day on the job may be comparable to the first day you went to school. At home you may have learned some of the basics, like how to write with a pencil, but knowledge of that skill and its application are two different things. People spoke in different ways at school than at home, and you came to understand the importance of recess, of raising your hand to get the teacher's attention, and how to follow other school rules. At work, you may have trained for your profession, but the academic knowledge only serves as your foundation, much as your socialization at home served to guide you at school. On the job they use jargon terms, have schedules that may include coffee breaks (recess), have a supervisor (teacher), and have their own rules, explicit and understood. On the first day, it was all new, even if many of the elements were familiar.

In order to better understand group development and its life cycle, many researchers have described the universal stages and phases of groups. While there are modern interpretations of these stages, most draw from the model proposed by Tuckman, "Developmental sequence in small groups" (Tuckman, 1965).

Table 8.2.2 Tuckman's Linear Model of Group Development. The table shows Tuckman's five stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning alongside brief descriptions of each stage's activities. Just like a person goes through stages in a relationship, so does a group. This model allows us to predict the several stages we can anticipate as we join a new group.

Table 8.2.2: Model of Group Development

Stages	Activities
Forming	Members come together, learn about each other, and determine the purpose of the group.
Storming	Members engage in more direct communication and get to know each other. Conflicts between group members will often arise during this stage.
Norming	Members establish spoken or unspoken rules about how they communicate and work. Status, rank and roles in the group are established.
Performing	Members fulfill their purpose and reach their goal.
Adjourning	Members leave the group.

Tuckman begins with the **forming stage** as the initiation of group formation. This stage is also called the orientation stage because individual group members come to know each other. Group members who are new to each other and can't predict each other's behavior can be expected to experience the stress of uncertainty (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975).

The more we know about others, and become accustomed to how they communicate, the better we can predict how they will interact with us in future contexts (Gudykunst, 2001). If you learn that Monday mornings are never a good time for your supervisor, you quickly learn to schedule meetings later in the week. Individuals are initially tentative and display caution as they begin to learn about the group and its members.

If you don't know someone very well, it is easy to offend. Each group member brings to the group a set of experiences, combined with education and a self-concept. You won't be able to read this information on a name tag, you will only come to know it through time and interaction (University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2021). Since the possibility of overlapping and competing viewpoints and perspectives exists, the group will experience a **storming stage**, a time of struggles as the members themselves sort out their differences. There may be more than one way to solve the problem or task at hand, and some group members may prefer one strategy over another. Some members of the group may be senior to the organization in comparison

to you, and members may treat them differently. Some group members may be as new as you are and just as uncertain about everyone's talents, skills, roles, and self-perceptions. The wise communicator will anticipate the storming stage and help facilitate opportunities for the members to resolve uncertainty before the work commences. There may be challenges for leadership and conflicting viewpoints. The sociology professor sees the world differently than the physics professor. The sales agent sees things differently than someone from accounting. A manager who understands and anticipates this normal challenge in the group's life cycle can help the group become more productive.

A clear definition of the purpose and mission of the group can help the members focus their energies. Interaction prior to the first meeting can help reduce uncertainty. Coffee and calories can help bring a group together. Providing the group with what they need, and opportunities to know each other prior to their task can increase efficiency.

Groups that make a successful transition from the storming stage will next experience the **norming stage**, where the group establishes norms, or informal rules, for behavior and interaction. Who speaks first? Who takes notes? Who is creative and visual, and who is detail-oriented? Sometimes our job titles and functions speak for themselves, but human beings are complex. We are not simply a list of job functions, and in the dynamic marketplace of today's business environment you will often find that people have talents and skills well beyond their "official" role or task. Drawing on these strengths can make the group more effective.

The norming stage is marked by less division and more collaboration. The level of anxiety associated with interaction is generally reduced, making for a more positive work climate that promotes listening. When people feel less threatened, and their needs are met, they are more likely to focus their complete attention on the purpose of the group. If they are still concerned with who does what, and whether they will speak in error, the interaction framework will stay in the storming stage. Tensions are reduced when the normative expectations are known, and the degree to which a manager can describe these at the outset can reduce the amount of time the group remains in uncertainty. Group members generally express more satisfaction with clear expectations and are more inclined to participate.

Ultimately, the purpose of a workgroup is performance, and the preceding stages lead us to the **performing stage**, in which the group accomplishes its mandate, fulfills its purpose, and reaches its goals. To facilitate performance, group members can't skip the initiation of getting to know each other, or the sorting out of roles and norms, but they can try to focus on performance with clear expectations from the moment the group is formed. Productivity is often how we measure success in business and industry, and the group has to produce. Outcome assessments may have been built into the system from the beginning and would serve as a benchmark for success. Wise group leaders know to celebrate success, as it brings more success, social cohesion, group participation, and a sense of job satisfaction. Incremental gains toward a benchmark may also be cause for celebration and support, and failure to reach a goal should be regarded as an opportunity for clarification.

It is generally wiser to focus on the performance of the group rather than individual contributions. Managers and group members will want to offer assistance to underperformers as well as congratulating members for their contributions. If the goal is to create a community where competition pushes each member to perform, individual highlights may serve your needs, but if you want a group to solve a problem or address a challenge as a group, you have to promote group cohesion. Members need to feel a sense of belonging, and praise (or the lack thereof) can be a sword with two edges. One stimulates and motivates, while the other demoralizes and divides.

Groups should be designed to produce and perform in ways and at levels that individuals cannot, or else you should consider compartmentalizing the tasks. The performing stage is where productivity occurs, and it is necessary to make sure the group has what it needs to perform. Missing pieces, parts, or information can stall the group, and reset the cycle to storming all over again. Loss of performance is inefficiency, and that carries a cost. Managers will be measured by the group's productivity and performance, and their success reflects on the manager. Make sure the performing stage is one that is productive and healthy for its members.

Example 8.2.1 The Lifespan of a Group

Imagine that you are the manager of a group that has produced an award-winning design for an ecologically innovative four-seat car. Their success is your success. Their celebrations are yours, even if you are not the focus of them. A manager manages the process, while group members perform. If you were a member of the group, and you helped design the headlights, you made a fundamental contribution to the style and safety of the car. Individual consumers may never consider the individual elements that went into designing those headlights, but they will recognize function and beauty. You will know that you could not have achieved that fundamental part of car design without help from the engineers in the group, and if

the number-crunching accountants had not seen the efficiency of the production process that produced it, it may never have survived the transition from prototype to production. The group came together and accomplished its goals with amazing results.

Now, as typically happens eventually with all groups, the time has come to move on to new assignments. In the **adjourning stage,** group members leave the group. The group may cease to exist, or it may be transformed with new members and a new set of goals. Your contributions may have caught the attention of management, and you may be assigned to the redesign of the flagship vehicle for your company. It's quite a professional honor, and it's yours because of your successful work in a group. Others will be reassigned to tasks that require their talents and skills, and you may or may not collaborate with them in the future. Or your group may be short-lived like the group pictured in Figure 8.2.2, gathered together for a conference. At the end of the conference this group will dissolve, having fulfilled their purpose likely never again coming together with the same group members.

You may miss the interactions with members, even the more cantankerous ones, and will experience both relief and a sense of loss. Like life, the group process is normal, and mixed emotions are to be expected. An experienced leader anticipates this stage and facilitates the separation with skill and ease. We often close this process with a ritual marking its passing, though the ritual may be as formal as an award or as informal as a "thank you" or a verbal acknowledgment of a job well done.



Figure 8.2.4: A major strength of problem-solving in a group is sharing ideas amongst the members. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Isa Haddow-Flood, Africa Centre via Wikimedia Commons)

On a more sober note, it is important not to forget that groups can reach the adjourning stage without having achieved success. Some businesses go bankrupt, some departments are closed, and some individuals lose their positions after a group fails to perform. Clubs disband through lack of involvement and social committees may abruptly end if the event is cancelled. Adjournment can come suddenly and unexpectedly, or gradually and piece by piece. Either way, a skilled communicator will be prepared and recognize it as part of the classic group life cycle.

The Life Cycle of Member Roles

Just as groups go through a life cycle when they form and eventually adjourn, so the members of groups fulfill different roles during this life cycle. These roles proposed by Moreland and Levine, (Moreland & Levine, 1982) are summarized in Table 8.2.3. Each stage of membership has a general set of behaviors which impact the group dynamics in a different way.

Table 8.2.3 The Life Cycle of Member Roles. Not only does the group evolve and change, but so does each group member during their time in the group.

Table 8.2.3: Life Cycle of a Group Member

Group Member Stages	Type of Member	Behavior
Stage 1	Potential Member	Curiosity and Interest
Stage 2	New Member	Joined the group but still an outsider, and unknown
Stage 3	Full Member	Knows the “rules” and is looked to for leadership
Stage 4	Divergent Member	Focuses on differences
Stage 5	Marginal Member	No longer involved
Stage 6	Ex-Member	No longer considered a member

This process has no set timetable. Some people overcome differences and stay in the group for years. Others get promoted and leave the group only when they get transferred to regional headquarters. As a skilled communicator, you will recognize the signs of divergence, just like you anticipate the storming stage, and do your best to facilitate success.

Let's look at a real world example. Suppose you are about to graduate from school, and you are in the midst of an employment search. You show up at the job fair in professional attire and completely prepared. They are impressed and set up an interview which goes well. A few weeks later, the company calls you with a job offer. After careful consideration, you decide to take the job offer and start the next week. Your first day on the job is positive, and they’ve assigned you a mentor. The conversations are positive, but at times you feel lost, as if they are speaking a language you can’t quite grasp. As a new group member, your level of acceptance will increase as you begin learning the groups’ rules, spoken and unspoken (Fisher, 1970). You will gradually move from the potential member role to the role of a new group member as you learn to fit into the group.

Over time and projects, you gradually increase your responsibilities. You are no longer looked at as the new person, and you can follow almost every conversation. You can’t quite say “I remember when” because your tenure hasn’t been that long, but you are a known quantity and know your way around. You are a full member of the group. **Full members** enjoy knowing the rules and customs, and can even create new rules. New group members look to full members for leadership and guidance. Full group members can control the agenda and have considerable influence on the agenda and activities.

Full members of a group, however, can and do come into conflict. When you were a new member, you may have remained silent when you felt you had something to say, but now you state your case. There is more than one way to get the job done. You may suggest new ways that emphasize efficiency over existing methods. Co-workers who have been working in the department for several years may be unwilling to adapt and change, and tension may result. Expressing different views can cause conflict and may even interfere with communication.

When this type of tension arises, divergent group members pull back, contribute less, and start to see themselves as separate from the group. Divergent group members have less eye contact, seek out each other’s opinions less frequently, and listen defensively. At the beginning of the process, you felt a sense of belonging, but now you don’t. Marginal group members start to look outside the group for their interpersonal needs.

After several months of trying to cope with these adjustments, you decide that you never really investigated the other two companies; that your job search process was incomplete. Perhaps you should take a second look at the options. You will report to work on Monday but will start the process of becoming an ex-member, one who no longer belongs. You may experience a sense of relief upon making this decision, given that you haven’t felt like you belonged to the group for a while. When you line up your next job and submit your resignation, you make it official.

Positive and Negative Member Roles

Notions of positive and negative will often depend on the context when discussing groups. For instance, if the group is well established with members who are capable and committed to a long-range project, then equal participation is most productive. So in this context if team member Max constantly interrupts others, speaks at length without pause, and dismisses alternative ideas, his dominating behavior frustrates members and prevents balanced group discussion. However, if veteran Max is leading a team of newbies with an extremely tight deadline, then his frequent dominance of the conversation is understandable and even needed for the group to meet their deadline. Whether a **divergent member** who focuses on differences is a hindrance or a help will depend on the makeup of the group. A **marginal member** who is technically still a member but no longer involved may think they are the only ones affected. But missing members from group meetings can erode morale and negatively affect

productivity.

Groups Are Everywhere

Groups have existed throughout human history, and continue to follow familiar patterns across emerging venues as we adapt to technology, computer-mediated interaction, suburban sprawl, and modern life. We need groups, and groups need us. Our relationship with groups warrants attention to this interdependence as we come to know ourselves, our communities, and our world.

Key Takeaways

- Humans naturally form groups, which shape our identities, meet needs, and influence how we communicate daily.
- Groups exist in many contexts such as family, work, school, and online and each develops unique rules, roles, and symbols.
- Group communication evolves through stages, each affecting relationships and outcomes.
- Effective leaders and group members recognize that behavior of positive and negative group roles helps or hinders collaboration.
- Groups achieve more than individuals alone, but success requires clear communication, shared goals, and effective interaction.

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8.3: Understanding Group Communication

Another Way to Look at Groups

Let's now turn our attention to another model's group lifecycle. Tubbs offers a distinct, though similar view to Tuckman's model that we covered in the last section. In Tubbs' Small Group Communication Theory (1995), the emphasis is on conflict vs. groupthink. As we've discussed, conflict is present in all groups, and we see the danger of groupthink raised in its absence. When **groupthink** is present the emphasis is on conformity. As a result, the group lacks diversity of viewpoints, and the tendency to go along with the flow can produce disastrous results.

The Differences Between an Effective and an Ineffective Group

Traits of an effective group:

- Group members are active, interested, and involved.
- Group members are comfortable; no obvious tensions.
- Group members understand and accept the task, goal, or activity.
- Disagreement is resolved amicably.
- Active listening behaviors can be frequently observed.
- Group members interact freely; no one member is in control.
- Group members openly discuss their progress.
- Criticism is present, accepted, and discussed openly.

Traits of an ineffective group:

- Some group members are not active, interested, or involved.
- Group member interactions include obvious tensions.
- Group members do not understand or accept the task, goal, or activity; passive/aggressive behaviors may be present.
- Disagreement is not resolved.
- Active listening behaviors cannot be frequently observed.
- Group members do not interact freely; one member is in control.
- Group members do not discuss their progress.
- Criticism is not present; groupthink is a significant risk.

Tubbs asserts that in the **orientation stage** (Tubbs, 1995) we get to know each other, focus on limitations, opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses, and begin to discuss the task at hand. This stage is followed by the **conflict stage**, characterized by different viewpoints, disagreements, competing agendas, and debate. This stage is natural and, in this model, is viewed as necessary to inhibit conformity or groupthink. The **consensus stage** follows conflict, where group members select some ideas or actions over others and the group proceeds to get the task done. It is characterized by agreement and teamwork. Individual differences are not as apparent, having been sorted out during the previous conflict stage. All groups end, and once the task has been completed as a result of consensus and action, the group dissolves in the **closure stage**. This stage often features statements of agreement and support for the result, action, or outcome.

How Can Members Strengthen Their Group?

- Group members take turns speaking and listening, and do not interrupt.
- Group members acknowledge and combine their strengths.
- Group members separate the issues from personalities, the message from the messenger.
- Group members outline action steps and discuss progress periodically.
- Group members clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.

How Can a Leader Strengthen Their Group?

- Encourage every member to contribute, speak, or share their thoughts.
- Encourage every member to understand their role, and everyone's roles, and how they complement each other.
- Encourage interdependence and interaction.
- Encourage the group to build on their common strengths and skills, celebrating incremental success.
- Encourage active listening and refrain from interruptions.
- Encourage group members to assess their collective progress frequently.

How Can a Leader Know if Their Group Is Going Well?

A Healthy Group:

- Individual members demonstrate interest and involvement.
- There are no obvious tensions.
- It is clear that the group understands and accepts the task.
- Listening behaviors are clearly demonstrated.
- Differences of opinion or viewpoint don't upset the group. Humor is a common characteristic, and tensions that may arise are quickly and amicably resolved.
- People feel free to express their viewpoints, thoughts, and feelings. Criticism is considered by group members and not considered as a personal attack.
- Consensus in decision-making is apparent.
- No one individual dominates the group.
- The group self-regulates, evaluating progress, regrouping, or advancing towards a common goal.
- Group member roles are clear and accepted.

An Unhealthy Group:

- Some topics are not discussed and understood as off-limits.
- There is a sense of urgency, preferring advancement and task completion before consideration or consensus.
- One or more group members dominate the discussion.
- Individual members demonstrate a lack of interest and involvement.
- There are obvious tensions.
- It is clear that the group does not understand or accept the task. Group members are arguing in cycles, returning again and again to themes with no resolution.
- Listening behaviors are not clearly demonstrated.
- Differences of opinion or viewpoint upset the group. Tensions rise with the expression of criticism.
- Criticism is not considered by group members and is often interpreted as a personal attack.
- Consensus in decision-making is not apparent.
- The group does not self-regulate, and little discussion on group progress is present.
- Group member roles are not clear or accepted.

Now we're going to address an important aspect of groups that's often overlooked: norms. Let's look at an example of a leader establishing a norm with a purpose. A new vice president came into the organization. She wanted communication to become more open and established a norm to begin this process. As she finished her first weekly meeting with her staff, she tossed a Nerf ball to one of them and asked them to say how they were feeling. When that person finished, the vice president asked her to toss the ball to someone else, and so on until everyone had spoken. This process soon became a regular feature of the group's meetings.



Figure 8.3.1: This group enhances cohesion and enjoyment of the task by combining work and eating a meal together. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Irvin Parco Sto. Tomas via Wikimedia Commons)

What Norms Are

In our section on group life cycles, you learned about Bruce Tuckman's model of forming, storming, norming, and performing. Norms are usually generated and adopted after a group's "forming" and "storming" stages. As a group moves from "forming" toward "performing," then norms help guide its members along the way. Whether we see them or not, norms are powerful predictors of a group's behavior. This group's norms allow for eating while working. Other groups may have a norm of eating together first, then working. Neither is better. The key is that the norm works for the group and the expectations are clear.

Group norms are rules or guidelines that reflect expectations of how group members should act and interact. They define what behaviors are acceptable or not; good or not; right or not; or appropriate or not (O'Hair & Wiemann, 2004, p. 19). Norms may relate to how people look, behave, or communicate with each other. Tossing a Nerf ball around a circle of workers is perhaps a peculiar way to start a meeting, and it probably doesn't contribute directly to achieving substantive goals, but it did represent a norm in the vice president's group we described, which, by the way, was a real group and not a product of imagination!

Some norms relate to how a group as a whole will act, e.g., when and how often it will meet. Others have to do with the behavior of individual group members and the roles those members play within the group. By defining what social behavior lies within acceptable boundaries, norms can help a group function smoothly and face conflict without falling apart (Hayes, 2004, p. 31). Thus, they can constitute a potent force to promote positive interaction among group members.

Origin of Norms

In a new group, norms may arise organically as members settle into their relationships and start to function together. Decisions need to be made and time needs to be taken for diverse activities such as identifying goals, determining tasks, and allocating human and tangible resources. Who will take the lead on these areas of the group's behavior has to be determined.

Further questions need to be answered as the group gets off the ground. Here are some examples:

Creating Norms

- What topics are and are not appropriate for the group to discuss?
- How and to what degree will members respect and attend to each other's statements and viewpoints?
- How and when, if ever, will the group behave casually?
- What mechanisms will the group use to solve problems?

Any group eventually needs to deal with these questions, and the answers it reaches will become embodied as norms.

Implicit Norms

Whether a group is new or not, its norms aren't always expressed or discussed. People may simply assume that certain norms exist and accept them "by unspoken consent" (Galanes & Adams, 2023). Consider "same seat syndrome," for example. How often have you found that people in a college classroom seem to gravitate every day to exactly the same chairs they've always sat in? Nobody says, "Hey, I've decided that this will be my chair forever" or "I see that that's your territory, so I'll never sit there," do they? Another example may be that when someone has a question, they must raise their hand rather than just speak up. No one announced to the group that this was required. But by full members modeling this behavior for new members, everyone understands that this is a group norm.

Often, norms are difficult for group members to express in words. What topics are okay or not okay to talk about during informal "chit-chat" may be a matter of unstated intuition rather than something that people can readily describe. Nevertheless, implicit norms may be extremely powerful, and even large groups are apt to have at least some implicit norms.

The cultural background each member brings to a group may lie beneath conscious awareness, yet it may exert a powerful influence on both that person's and the group's behavior and expectations. Just as a fish is unaware that it lives in water, a person may easily go through life and participate in group interactions without perceiving that they are the product of a culture.

Explicit Norms

Sometimes group norms are stated outright, either orally or in writing; then they are explicit norms. Such explicit rules may be imposed by an authority figure such as an executive or designated team leader. They may be part of formal policies or regulations. Wearing a uniform or answering the telephone in a certain way, for instance, may be written requirements in a workplace group. Another example of an explicit norm would be for each member to receive a copy of the guidelines for the group, or that in each meeting, someone takes minutes.

Manuals and even books have been composed to provide members of groups with norms of how to behave. A manager in one organization we know wrote a policy in response to almost every problem or difficulty his division experienced. Because the manager served for more than 15 years in his position, the collection of these incident-based policies eventually filled a large tabbed binder. The bigger the group, the more likely it is that its norms will be rigid and explicit like these (Lamberton & Minor-Evans, 2014).

Interaction, Procedure, Status, and Achievement Norms

Norms may relate to four aspects of a group's identity: interaction, procedure, status, and achievement (Engleberg & Wynn, 1997).

Types of Norms

Interaction Norms: These specify how people communicate within the group. Is it expected that everyone in the group should have an opportunity to speak about any topic that the group deals with? How long is it okay for one person to speak?

Procedure-Oriented Norms: These identify how the group functions. Does it hold meetings according to an established schedule? Who speaks first when the group gets together? Does someone distribute a written record of what happened after every time the group gets together?

Status Norms: These indicate the degree of influence that members possess and how that influence is obtained and expressed. Who decides when a group discussion has concluded? When and how are officers for the group elected?

Achievement Norms: These relate to standards the group sets for the nature and amount of its work. Must members cite readings or the comments of authorities when they make presentations to the group? What happens to a group member who completes tasks late or fails to complete them at all?

Enforcing and changing the norms of a group throughout its life cycle may present substantial challenges. Those challenges can

best be overcome if members share a common understanding of their group's norms. Verbal communication is based on several basic principles. In this section, we'll examine each principle and explore how it influences everyday communication. Whether it's a simple conversation with a co-worker or a formal sales presentation to a board of directors, these principles apply to all contexts of communication.

Our Reality Is Shaped by Our Language

What would your life be like if you had been raised in a country other than the one where you grew up? Malaysia, for example? Italy? Afghanistan? or Bolivia? Or suppose you had been born male instead of female, or vice versa. Or had been raised in the northeastern U.S. instead of the West Coast, the Midwest instead of the Southeast. In any of these cases, you would not have the same identity you have today. You would have learned another set of customs, values, traditions, other language patterns, and ways of communicating. You would be a different person who communicates in different ways.

You didn't choose your birth, customs, values, traditions, or language. You didn't even choose to learn to read this sentence or to speak with those of your community, but somehow you accomplished this challenging task. As an adult, you can choose to see things from a new or diverse perspective, but what language do you think with? It's not just the words themselves, or even how they are organized, that make communication such a challenge. Your language itself, ever-changing and growing, in many ways, determines your reality (Whorf, 1956, pp. 207–219). You can't escape your language or culture completely, and always see the world through a shade or tint of what you've been taught, learned, or experienced.

Suppose you were raised in a culture that values formality. At work, you pride yourself on being well-dressed. It's part of your expectation for yourself and, whether you admit it or not, for others. Many people in your work group, however, come from less formal cultures, and they prefer "business casual" attire. You may be able to recognize the difference, and because humans are highly adaptable, you may get used to a less formal dress expectation, but it won't change your fundamental values.

How does this insight lend itself to your understanding of verbal communication in groups? Do all people share the same paradigms, words, or ideas? Will you be presenting ideas outside of your group's frame of reference? Outside of their worldview? Get outside of your own frame of reference and consider how to best communicate your thoughts, ideas, and points to a group that may not have the same experiences or understanding of the topic.

By taking into account your group's background and experience, you can become more "other-oriented," a successful strategy to narrow the gap between you and your group members. The woman in this image demonstrates focusing on others as she leans forward with her eyes fixed on the speaker in her group. Our experiences are like sunglasses, tinting the way we see the world. Our challenge, perhaps, is to avoid letting them function as blinders, like those worn by working horses, which create tunnel vision and limit our perspective.



Figure 8.3.2: Inexperienced group members like this attendee to "Future Leaders of the Pacific Conference" can learn from members who have more expertise. (Public Domain; US Embassy from New Zealand via Wikimedia Commons)

Language Is Arbitrary and Symbolic

Words have two types of meanings: denotative and connotative. Attention to both is necessary to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation. The **denotative meaning** is the common meaning, often found in the dictionary. The **connotative meaning** is often not found in the dictionary but in the community of users itself. It can involve an emotional association with a word, positive or negative, and can be individual or collective, but it is not universal.

With a common vocabulary in both denotative and connotative terms, effective group communication becomes a more distinct possibility. But what if we have to transfer meaning from one vocabulary to another? That is essentially what we are doing when we translate a message. In such cases, language and culture can sometimes make for interesting twists. (Sterngold, 1998). Capturing our ideas with words is a challenge when both conversational partners speak the same language, but across languages, cultures, and generations, the complexity multiplies exponentially.

As you use language to make sense of your experiences, as part of our discussion, you no doubt came to see that language and verbal communication can work both for you and against you. Language allows you to communicate, but it also allows you to miscommunicate and misunderstand. The same system we use to express our most intimate thoughts can be frustrating when it fails to capture our thoughts, to represent what we want to express, and to reach our group. For all its faults, though, it is the best system we have, and part of improving the group communication process is the clear identification of where it breaks down. Anticipate where a word or expression may need more clarification, and you will be on your way to reducing errors and improving verbal communication.

In this next section, we discuss how words can serve either as a bridge or a barrier to understanding and communication of meaning. Our goals of effective and efficient group communication mean an inherent value of words and terms that keep the bridge clear and free of obstacles.

Jargon

Jargon is an occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession. Jargon does not necessarily imply formal education, but instead focuses on the language people in a profession use to communicate with each other. Members of the information technology department have a distinct group of terms that refer to common aspects in their field. Members of the marketing department, or advertising, or engineering, research, and development also have sets of terms they use within their professional community. People who work with sewing machines, in automobile factories, or in agriculture, also have jargon in their profession, independent of formal education.

Whether or not to use jargon is often a judgment call, and one that is easier to make in speaking than in writing. In an oral context, we may be able to use a technical term and instantly know whether or not they “got it.” If they didn’t, we can define it on the spot. In written language, we lack that immediate response and must attend more to the context of the receiver. The more we learn about our group, company, or corporation, the better we can tailor our chosen words. If we lack information or want our document to be understood by a variety of readers, it pays to use common words and avoid jargon. A good example is this meeting of medical school faculty pictured below. Unless you are also a healthcare professional, you would doubtless find much of their discussion unintelligible due to the medical jargon used.



Figure 8.3.3: Since all of these group members are doctors, they can communicate clearly and efficiently by using jargon understood by them all. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Saltrabook via Wikimedia Commons)

Slang

Think for a moment about the words and expressions you use when you communicate with your best friends. If someone from your work group were to hang out with you and your friends, would they understand all the words you use, the music you listen to, the stories you tell, and the way you tell them? Probably not, because you and your friends probably use certain words and expressions in ways that have special meaning to you.

This special form of language, which in some ways resembles jargon, is slang. **Slang** is the use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, non-standard, humorous, or rebellious effect. It differs from jargon in that it is used in informal contexts, among friends or members of a certain age group, rather than by professionals in a certain industry.

Since our emphasis in group communication is on clarity, and a slang word runs the risk of creating misinterpretation, it is generally best to avoid slang in certain contexts. Some examples might be where the members of a group are from a variety of backgrounds, the group is newly formed, or where time-sensitive goals (like a work project) require clear communication from the beginning.

Euphemisms

A **euphemism** involves substituting an acceptable word for an offensive, controversial, or unacceptable one that conveys the same or similar meaning. The problem is that the group still knows what the expression means and understands that the communicator is choosing a euphemism for the purpose of sounding more educated or genteel.

Euphemisms can also be used sarcastically or humorously—“H-E-double-hockey-sticks,” for example, is a euphemism for “hell” that may be amusing in some contexts. If your friend has just gotten a new job as a janitor, you may jokingly ask, “How’s my favorite sanitation engineer this morning?” But such humor is not always appreciated and can convey disrespect even when none is intended.

Euphemistic words are not always disrespectful, however. For example, when referring to a death, it is considered polite in many parts of the U.S. to say that the person “passed” or “passed away,” rather than the relatively insensitive word, “died.” Similarly, people say, “I need to find a bathroom,” when it is well understood they are not planning to take a bath.

Still, these polite euphemisms are exceptions to the rule. Euphemisms are generally more of a hindrance than a help to understanding. In group communication, the goal is clarity, and the very purpose of a euphemism is to be vague. To be clear, choose words that mean what you intend to convey.

Doublespeak

Doublespeak is the deliberate use of words to disguise, obscure, or change meaning. Doublespeak is often present in bureaucratic communication, where it can serve to cast a person or an organization in a less unfavorable light than plain language would do.

When you ask a friend, “How does it feel to be downsized?” you are using a euphemism to convey humor, possibly even dark humor. Your friend’s employer was likely not joking, though, when the action was announced as a “downsizing” rather than as a “layoff” or “dismissal.” In military communications, “collateral damage” is often used to refer to civilian deaths, but no mention of the dead is present.

If the meaning was successfully hidden from the group, one might argue that the doublespeak was in fact effective. But our goal continues to be clear and concise group communication with a minimum of misinterpretation. Learn to recognize doublespeak by what it does not communicate as well as what it does communicate.

We need to consider how language can be used to enlighten or deceive, encourage or discourage, empower or destroy the group. By defining the terms we use and choosing precise words, we will maximize our group’s understanding of our message. In addition, it is important to consider the group members, control your tone, check for understanding, and focus on results. Recognizing the power of verbal communication is the first step to understanding its role and impact on the communication process.

Define Your Terms

Even when you are careful to craft your message clearly and concisely, not everyone will understand every word you say or write. As an effective group communicator, you know it is your responsibility to give every group member every advantage in understanding your meaning.

Be aware of any words you are using that may not be familiar to everyone in your group, and provide clues to the meaning in the process of making and supporting your points. Give examples to illustrate each concept. Use parallels from everyday life. Rephrase unfamiliar terms in different words. In summary, keep your group members in mind and imagine yourself in their place. This will help you to adjust your writing level and style to their needs, maximizing the likelihood that your message will be understood. To increase understanding, choose precise words that paint as vivid and accurate a mental picture as possible for your group. If you use language that is vague or abstract, your meaning may be lost or misinterpreted.

Consider Your Group Members

In addition to precise words and clear definitions, contextual clues are important to guide your group members during a discussion. If you use a jargon word, which may be appropriate for many people in your group, follow it with a common reference that clearly relates its essential meaning. With this positive strategy, you will meet group members’ needs with diverse backgrounds. Internal summaries tell us what we’ve heard and forecast what is to come. It’s not just the words, but also how people hear them that counts. One of the best ways to display respect for your group is to not exceed the expected time in a presentation or staff meeting. Your careful attention to contextual clues will demonstrate that you are clearly considering your group.

Check for Understanding

When we talk to each other face to face, seeing if someone understood you isn’t all that difficult. Even if they really didn’t get it, you can see, ask questions, and clarify right away. One tool you can use is active listening, which you will learn more about later in this chapter. That gives oral communication, particularly live interaction, a distinct advantage. Use this immediacy for feedback to your advantage. Make time for feedback and plan for it. Ask clarifying questions. In oral communication, feedback is a core component of the communication model, and we can often see it, hear it, and it takes less effort to assess it.

Be Results-Oriented

For task-oriented groups, the assignment has to be completed. It can be a challenge to balance the need for attention to detail

with the need to arrive at the end product—and its due date. (Covey, 1989). Stephen Covey suggests beginning with the end in mind as one strategy for success. If you have done your preparation by knowing your assignment goals, your desired results, and have learned about your group members and tailored the message to their expectations, then you are well on your way to completing the task.

Key Takeaways

- Group development follows a series of stages that help members build relationships, manage conflict, and work toward goals.
- Conflict is a natural and necessary part of group life, as it prevents conformity and encourages diverse perspectives.
- Groups rely on clear communication, active listening, and open discussion to remain effective and avoid unhealthy dynamics.
- Shared norms and expectations guide how members interact, resolve disagreements, and move toward consensus.
- Effective groups show signs of cooperation, respect, and balanced participation, while ineffective groups reveal tension, dominance, or lack of involvement.

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8.4: Nonverbal Communication in Groups

The Complexity of Nonverbal Communication

Chances are, you have had many experiences where words were misunderstood or where the meaning of words was unclear. When it comes to nonverbal communication, meaning is even harder to discern, especially in a group. We can sometimes tell what people are communicating through their nonverbal communication, but there is no foolproof “dictionary” of how to interpret nonverbal messages. **Nonverbal communication** is the process of conveying a message without the use of words. It can include gestures and facial expressions, tone of voice, timing, posture, and where you stand as you communicate. It can help or hinder the clear understanding of your message, but it doesn’t reveal (and can even mask) what you are really thinking. Nonverbal communication is far from simple, and its complexity makes our understanding of the role it plays in group communication a worthy but challenging goal.

Nonverbal communication gives our thoughts and feelings away before we are even aware of what we are thinking or how we feel. People may see and hear more than you ever anticipated. Your nonverbal communication includes both intentional and unintentional messages, but since it all happens so fast, the unintentional ones can contradict what you know you are supposed to say or how you are supposed to react.

Nonverbal Communication Can Add to or Replace Verbal Communication

People tend to pay more attention to how you say it than what you actually say. We communicate nonverbally more than we engage in verbal communication, and often use nonverbal expressions to add to, or even replace, words we might otherwise say. We use a nonverbal gesture called an illustrator to communicate our message effectively and reinforce our point. Your fellow group member , Alejandra, may ask you, "How about having our meeting in the conference room today?" You may simply nod, and she may reply with a smile and nod in reply. No words were exchanged after her question. But you are both clear as to the location of the group meeting.

In addition to illustrators or emblematic nonverbal communication, we also use regulators. “Regulators are nonverbal messages which control, maintain, or discourage interaction” (McLean, 2002). For example, if someone is telling you a message that is confusing or upsetting, you may hold up your hand, a commonly recognized regulator that asks the current speaker in a group to stop talking.

Let’s say you are in a meeting presenting your company’s latest product. If your group members nod their heads in agreement on important points and maintain good eye contact, it is a good sign. Nonverbally, they are using regulators encouraging you to continue with your presentation. In contrast, if they look away, tap their feet, and begin drawing in the margins of their notebook or their tablet, these are regulators suggesting that you had better think of a way to regain their interest or else wrap up your presentation quickly. That's not a problem with the group here. The member sharing his idea with his words as well as gestures sits opposite a listener who is keeping eye contact and leaning forward with interest and concentration.



Figure 8.4.1: Like this man demonstrating an idea with his hands to fellow group members, we can often get an idea across more effectively by reinforcing our words with gestures. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Victor Grigas via Wikimedia Commons)

“Affect displays are nonverbal communication that express emotions or feelings" (McLean, 2002). An affect display that might accompany holding up your hand for silence would be to frown and shake your head from side to side. When you and Alejandra are waiting in the conference room for the meeting to begin, as group members appear at the door, you smile and wave fellow group members to come into the room, nonverbally assuring them that this is the right location for the meeting.

“Adaptors are displays of nonverbal communication that help you adapt to your environment and each context, helping you feel comfortable and secure” (McLean, 2002). A self-adaptor involves you meeting your need for security by playing with your hair, for example. By fiddling with your hair, you are adapting something about yourself in a way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose. Combing your hair would be an example of a purposeful action, unlike a self-adaptive behavior. An object-adaptor involves the use of an object in a way for which it was not designed. You may see group members tapping their pen or playing with it, while ignoring you and your presentation. They are using the pen in a way other than its intended design, an object-adaptor that communicates a lack of engagement or enthusiasm in your speech.

Intentional nonverbal communication can complement, repeat, replace, mask, or contradict what we say. When Alejandra suggested a group meeting location, and you smiled and nodded, you were complementing the message. You could also have decided to communicate nonverbally that you couldn't make the meeting at all by shaking your head “no” while pointing to your watch, phone, or computer screen, communicating work and time issues. Though that may be masking your real thoughts or feelings that you could make the time, but feel the meetings are nonproductive. Masking involves the substitution of appropriate nonverbal communication for nonverbal communication you may want to display (McLean, 2002). Though masking nonverbal messages may make it easier in the short term, nonverbal behavior that conflicts with verbal communication can confuse the listener and affect group dynamics.

Table 8.4.1 gives us a list of some nonverbal expressions and why we use them.

Table 8.4.1: Nonverbal Expressions

Adaptors	Helps us feel comfortable or indicate emotions or moods
Complementing	Reinforcing verbal communication
Contradicting	Contradicting verbal communication
Emblems	Nonverbal gestures that carry a specific meaning, and can replace or reinforce words
Illustrators	Reinforce a verbal message
Masking	Substituting more appropriate displays for less appropriate displays
Object-adaptors	Using an object for a purpose other than its intended design

Adaptors	Helps us feel comfortable or indicate emotions or moods
Regulators	Control, encourage or discourage interaction
Repeating	Repeating verbal communication
Replacing	Replacing verbal communication
Self-adaptors	Adapting something about yourself in a way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose
Affect displays	Express emotions or feelings

Nonverbal Communication Is Universal

Consider the many contexts in which interaction occurs during your day: in the morning, at work, after work, at home, with friends, with family. Our list could go on for quite awhile. Now consider the differences in nonverbal communication across these many contexts. When you are at work, do you jump up and down and say whatever you want? Why or why not? You may not engage in that behavior because of expectations at work and norms of your work group. But the fact remains that from the moment you wake until you sleep, you are surrounded by nonverbal communication.

If you had been born in a different country, to different parents, perhaps even as a member of the opposite sex, your whole world would be quite different. Yet nonverbal communication would remain a universal constant. It may not look the same, or get used in the same way, but it will still be nonverbal communication in its many functions and displays.

Regardless of the culture, context or type of group, nonverbal communication can be confusing. We need contextual clues to help us understand, or begin to understand, what a movement, gesture, or lack of display means. Then we have to figure it all out based on our prior knowledge (or lack thereof) of the person and hope to get it right. Talk about a challenge. Nonverbal communication is everywhere, and we all use it, but that doesn't make it simple or independent of when, where, why, or how we communicate.

We Believe Nonverbal Communication More Than Verbal

Let's ask the question: What would you believe in a group meeting: someone's actions or their words? According to Seiler and Beall, most people tend to believe the nonverbal message over the verbal message (Seiler & Beall, 2000). People will often answer "actions speak louder than words" and place a disproportionate emphasis on the nonverbal response. Humans aren't logical all the time, and they do experience feelings and attitudes that change. Still, we place more confidence in nonverbal communication, particularly when it comes to lying behaviors.

Try This 8.4.1 Lying or Not?

Observe your fellow group members. If you see this nonverbal behavior, there's likely an issue that needs to be addressed. (Zuckerman et al.,1981)

- Reduction in eye contact while engaged in a conversation
- Awkward pauses in conversation
- Higher pitch in voice
- Deliberate pronunciation and articulation of words
- Increased delay in response time to a question
- Increased body movements such as changes in posture
- Decreased smiling
- Decreased rate of speech

If you notice concerning nonverbal behavior in your group, you may want to take a closer look. Though remember not to assume. Follow up your observations with verbal communication to confirm whether or not your assumptions were correct. Notice the different nonverbal behavior in the four group members below. Two of the members with their expressionless faces appear disengaged from the group discussion, an issue a good facilitator will address. Over time we learn people's patterns of speech and behavior, and form a set of expectations. Variation from their established patterns, combined with the clues above, can serve to alert you to the possibility that something deserves closer attention.



Figure 8.4.2: Nonverbal communication can often reveal hidden motives. While members may say they value the group process, body language and facial expression can be a more accurate reflection. For instance in this picture, two group members look engaged while two members look bored or disinterested. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Visem via Wikimedia Commons)

Nonverbal Communication Is Key in the Group Member Relationship

When we first see each other, before anyone says a word, we are already sizing each other up. Within the first few seconds, we have made judgments about each other based on what we wear, our physical characteristics, and even our posture. Are these judgments accurate? That is hard to know without context, but we can say that nonverbal communication certainly affects first impressions, for better or worse. When group members first meet, nonverbal communication in terms of space, dress, and even personal characteristics can contribute to assumed expectations. The expectations might not be accurate or even fair, but it is important to recognize that they will be present. There is truth in the saying, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” Since beginnings are fragile times, your attention to aspects you can control, both verbal and nonverbal, will help contribute to the first step of forming a relationship with your group. Your eye contact with group members, use of space, and degree of formality will continue to contribute to that relationship. Your nonverbal communication is part of the message and can contribute to, or detract from, your overall goals. By being aware of them, you can learn to control them. Now that you understand the principles of nonverbal communication, let's explore the eight characteristics of this fascinating yet challenging aspect of group communication.

Ways to Look at Nonverbal Communication

- Space
- Time
- Physical characteristics
- Body movements
- Touch
- Paralanguage
- Artifacts
- Environment

Space

When we discuss **space** in a nonverbal context, we mean the space between objects and people. Space is often associated with social rank and is an important part of group communication. Who gets the corner office? Why is the head of the table important and who gets to sit there?

People from diverse cultures may have different normative space expectations. If you are from a large urban area, having people

stand close to you may be normal. If you are from a rural area, or a culture where people expect more space, someone may be standing "too close" for comfort and not know it.

According to Edward T. Hall, **Proxemics** is the study of man's spatial relations and boundaries (Hall, 1963). While serving in the European and South Pacific Regions in the Corps of Engineers during World War II, Hall traveled around the globe. As he moved from one place to another, he noticed that people in different countries kept different distances from each other. In France, they stood closer to each other than they did in England. Hall wondered why that was and began to study what he called proxemics, or the study of the human use of space and distance in communication.

In *The Hidden Dimension*, (Hall, 1966), he indicated there are two main aspects of space: territory and personal space. Hall drew on anthropology to address the concepts of dominance and submission, and noted that the more powerful person often claims more space. This plays an important role in modern society, from who gets the corner office to how we negotiate space between vehicles. We recognize the basic need for personal space, but the normative expectations for space vary greatly by culture. From where you stand in a workout class in relation to others, to where you place your book bag in class, your personal expectations of space are often at variance with others. Becoming aware of how we use space helps our understanding of how group communication works.

Each group has norms for nonverbal behavior as well. In North America, eye contact is expected. Big movements and gestures are not generally expected and can be distracting. The speaking group member occupies a space on the "stage," when they have the "floor" (or it is their turn to speak), even if there are co-workers on either side. When you occupy that space, the group will expect to behave in certain ways. Group members are expected to pay attention to, and interact with, each other, even if the feedback is primarily nonverbal. Your movements should coordinate with the tone, rhythm, and content of your message. Fiddling with your watch or jewelry, keeping your hands in your pockets or your arms crossed may communicate nervousness, or even defensiveness, and detract from your message.

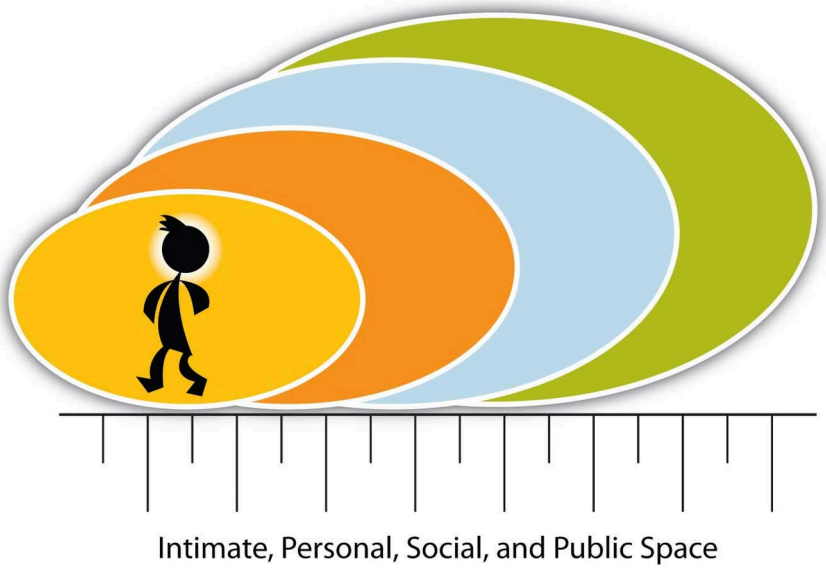


Figure 8.4.3: This cartoon man walks with ever-increasing bubbles stretching out behind him representing the four main categories of distance used in communication. As we walk through life, our bubbles are invisible. But nonetheless they affect our nonverbal communication. According to Hall, how big each bubble is depends largely on culture. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 E. Hall via lardbucket)

Time

Do you know what time it is? How aware you are of time varies by culture and normative expectations of adherence (or ignorance) of time. Some people, and the communities and cultures they represent, are very time-oriented. The Eurorail Trains in Germany are famous for departing and arriving according to the schedule. In contrast, if you take the train in Argentina you'll find that the schedule is more of an approximation of when the train will leave or arrive.

"Time is money" is a common saying across many cultures, and reveals a high value for time. In social contexts, it often reveals social status and power. Who are you willing to wait for? A doctor for an office visit when you are sick? A potential employer for

a job interview? Your significant other, or children? Sometimes we get impatient, and our impatience underscores our value for time.

When you give a presentation to your team or group, does your group have to wait for you? Time is a relevant factor in the communication process in your speech. The best way to show your group respect is to honor the time expectation associated with your speech. Always try to stop speaking before the group stops listening; if the members perceive that you have "gone over time," they will be less willing to listen. This in turn will have a negative impact on your ability to communicate your message.

Chronemics the study of how people perceive and use time, plays a vital role in understanding group communication. Communication scholar Tom Bruneau devoted much of his career to examining how time influences human interaction, producing a significant body of work that established chronemics as a distinct field of study (Bruneau, 2012). His research highlights how time functions not only as a resource but also as a cultural value that shapes social relationships. In many Western societies, time is often equated with money. Some cultures place an emphasis on speed, efficiency, and short-term results. The fast-paced rhythm of life in these contexts could reflect broader cultural ideals that prioritize productivity and acceleration (Schwartz, 1989). In contrast, other cultures demonstrate greater respect for patience, long-term planning, and slowing down the pace of life. These cultural differences reveal that the way we experience and communicate about time is not universal, but deeply embedded in social norms, traditions, and expectations.

Across cultures the value of time may vary whether that be individually or in groups. Some Mexican-American friends may invite you to a barbecue at 8 P.M., but when you arrive you are the first guest, because it is understood that the gathering actually doesn't start until after 9 P.M. In France, similarly, an 8 P.M. party invitation would be understood to indicate you should arrive around 8:30, but in Sweden 8 P.M. means 8 P.M., and latecomers may not be welcome. Some Native Americans, particularly elders, speak in well-measured phrases and take long pauses between phrases. They do not hurry their speech or compete for their turn, knowing no one will interrupt them. (McLean, 1998). K.S. Sitaram and M. Prosser point out that another example of how different cultures use time is how some Orthodox Jews observe religious days when they do not work, cook, drive, or use electricity. People around the world have different ways of expressing value for time (Sitaram & Prosser, 1998).

Body Movements

The study of body movements, called **kinesics**, is key to understanding nonverbal communication. Since your actions will significantly contribute to the effectiveness of your group interactions, let's examine how our facial expression to our hand gestures communicate in the group setting.

Body movements can complement the verbal message by reinforcing the main idea. For example, you may be providing an orientation presentation to your team about a new software program. As you say, "Click on this tab," you may also initiate that action. Your verbal and nonverbal messages reinforce, or complement, each other. You can also reinforce the message by repeating it. If you first say "Click on the tab," and then motion with your hand to the right, indicating that the other group members should move the cursor arrow with the mouse to the tab, your repetition can help the listener understand the message.

In addition to repeating your message, body movements can also regulate conversations. Nodding your head in a group meeting to indicate that you are listening may encourage the person speaking to continue. Holding your hand up, palm out, may signal them to stop and provide a pause where you can start to answer.

Body movements also substitute or replace verbal messages (Ekman & Friesen, 1967). They found that facial features communicate to others our feelings, but our body movements often reveal how intensely we experience those feelings. For example, if a group member makes a face of frustration while trying to use the software program, they may need assistance. If they push away from the computer and separate themselves physically from interacting with it, they may be extremely frustrated. Learning to gauge feelings and their intensity as expressed by group members takes time and patience, and your attention to them will improve your ability to facilitate positive interactions.

Touch

Touch in communication interaction is called **haptics** according to Seiler and Beall, (Seiler & Beall, 2000). Before beginning a group meeting, you may interact with people by shaking hands and making casual conversation. If the group is more informal, depending on the culture, hugs may be expected. The group of male college students below is a good example of how their comfort with one another and the informality of the occasion allow them to put a hand on a shoulder and come in close for a picture. In a more formal setting, any touch will be more limited, such as a handshake with an outstretched arm. Even this amount of physical interaction can help establish trust before you take the stage for a presentation or begin facilitating a group

discussion. While speaking in groups we do not often touch people on the team, but we do interact with visual aids, our note cards, and other objects.



Figure 8.4.4: Like these college students, friendship can be demonstrated by close proximity. How close and with whom we stand close enough to touch is often determined by cultural norms. (CC BY 2.0; Nazareth College from Rochester NY, USA via Wikimedia Commons)

Paralanguage

Paralanguage is the exception to the definition of nonverbal communication. You may recall that we defined nonverbal communication as not involving words, but paralanguage exists when we are speaking, using words. **Paralanguage** involves verbal and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including tone, intensity, pausing, and even silence.

Perhaps you've also heard of a pregnant pause, a silence between verbal messages that is full of meaning. The meaning itself may be hard to understand or decipher, but it is there nonetheless. For example, your co-worker Hayoon comes back from a sales meeting with a big smile. You may ask if the meeting went all right. She smiles bigger and just says "You could say that." and high-fives the co-worker who went with her to the meeting. Something good happened, though you may not know what. It could be Hayoon got a personal commendation from the president for the report she presented. Or perhaps the whole department was commended for a job well done and bonus checks will be arriving soon. This delay in presenting the full message can strengthen its impact as the listeners build anticipation.

Silence or vocal pauses can communicate hesitation, indicate the need to gather thought, or serve as a sign of respect according to Keith Basso (Basso, 1970). As an anonymous source stated, "it is not the case that a man who is silent says nothing." Sometimes we learn just as much, or even more, from what a person does not say as what they do say (Basso, 1970). In addition, both Basso and Susan Philips (Philips, 1983), found that traditional speech among Native Americans places a special emphasis on silence.

Artifacts

Artifacts are forms of decorative ornamentation that are chosen to represent self-concept. They can include rings and tattoos, but may also include brand names and logos. From clothes to cars, watches, briefcases, purses, and even eyeglasses, what we choose to surround ourselves with communicates something about our sense of self. They may project gender, role or position, class or status, personality and group membership or affiliation. Paying attention to each group member's artifacts can give you a sense of the self each individual wants to communicate, and may allow you to be a more effective communicator in your group.

Environment

Environment involves the physical and psychological aspects of the communication context. More than the tables and chairs in an office, the environment is an important part of the dynamic group communication process. The perception of one's

environment influences one's reaction to it. For example, Google is famous for its work environment, with spaces created for physical activity and even in-house food service around the clock. The expense is no doubt considerable, but Google's actions speak volumes. The results produced in the environment, designed to facilitate creativity, interaction, and collaboration within the group, are worth the effort.

Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication in groups is complex, context-dependent, and often harder to interpret than verbal communication.
- We frequently believe nonverbal cues over spoken words, which makes them powerful in shaping group interactions and relationships.
- Nonverbal communication can complement or even contradict verbal communication, influencing how messages are received.
- Time, space, body movements, touch, paralanguage, artifacts, and environment all shape how nonverbal communication is expressed and understood.
- First impressions in groups are strongly affected by the nonverbal signals we send and receive.

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8.5: Listening in Groups

The Importance of Listening

Communicating involves the translation of your thoughts and ideas into words. Speaking or writing involves sharing your perspective with others. Listening, therefore, involves making sense of what is shared with us, and can require all of our attention. For us to understand each other, we have to listen and make sense of each other's perspectives. In order for us to work effectively as a group or team, we need to listen to each other, not just hear each other or wait for our turn to deliver a monologue, make our point, or convince others that we are right. Each group member brings a valuable perspective, indeed a world, to contribute to the team.

> *If speaking is silver, then listening is gold.*
>
> *Turkish Proverb*
>
> (Singh, 2023)

When group members interact, do you find yourself getting lost in your own thoughts? While text messages and other distractions can be powerful, the most distracting voice by far is our own internal monologue. If you silently talk to yourself, the action is a reflection of the communication process, but you play the role of the audience. In your own head, you may make sense of your words and their meaning. You may have rehearsed your "lines" or what you want to say, but in the process, you've completely missed the turns and contributions in the conversation. Then, when I hear what you said, what you meant may escape me. I might not "get it" because I don't know you, your references, your perspectives, your word choices, your underlying meaning and motivation for speaking in the first place.

Hearing vs. Listening

Sometimes people mistake hearing for listening. Hearing involves the physiological process of recognizing sounds. Your ears receive and transmit the information to your brain. Once your brain receives the signals, it starts to make sense to you. This is the listening stage, where you create meaning based on previous experiences and contextual cues to make sense of the sounds.

Knowing your team involves understanding others and their perspectives to see if they understand your words, examples, or the frames of reference you use to communicate your experiences, points, and conclusions. Ask yourself, when was the last time you had a miscommunication with someone? No doubt it was fairly recently, as it is for most people. It's not people's fault that language, both verbal and nonverbal, is an imperfect system. We can, however, take responsibility for the utility and limitations of language to try to gain a better understanding of how we can communicate more effectively. We can choose to actively listen to each other and ask clarifying questions instead of rushing to judgment or making statements.

As a communicator, consider both the role of the speaker and the group, and not only what and how you want to communicate, but what and how your team needs you to communicate with them in order to present an effective message.

Let's first follow the advice given by the character Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "to thine own self be true." This relates to the notion that you need to know yourself, or your perspective, before you can explore ways to know others and communicate more effectively. You will examine how you perceive stimuli, choosing some information over others, organizing the information according to your frame of reference, and interpreting it, deciding what it means to you and whether you should remember it or just ignore it and move on. We can recognize that not everyone tunes into the same music, trends in clothing, or even classes, so experiences or stimuli can have different meanings. Still, we can find common ground and communicate effectively if we only choose to listen to each other. As the popular author and Hollywood entrepreneur Wilson Mizner said, "A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while, he knows something" (McLean, 2015).

Learning to listen to your fellow group members is an important part of group communication. Too often, instead of listening, we mentally rehearse what we want to say. Similarly, when we read, we are often trying to multitask and therefore cannot read with full attention. Inattentive listening can cause us to miss much of what the speaker is sharing with us.

Active Listening

You've probably experienced the odd sensation of driving somewhere and, having arrived, have realized you don't remember driving. Your mind may have been filled with other issues, and you drove on autopilot. It's dangerous when you drive, and it is dangerous in communication. We sometimes do that when we're "listening" to another group member. Active listening is key to any effective group. Practicing **active listening** is when you choose to listen attentively to the other person and where needed respond verbally and nonverbally. People communicate with words, expressions, and even in silence, and your attention to them will make you a better communicator in any group setting.

Types of Listening

The ways we listen vary according to our preferences and purposes. Several theorists have identified types of listening that can help us understand our own behavior and that of the other group members.

Galanes and Adams wrote that people fall into four possible orientation categories as they listen to one another in groups. People-oriented listeners, also known as "relational listeners," direct themselves toward detecting and preserving positive emotional features of a relationship. In a group, people-oriented listeners may share their feelings openly and strive to defuse anger or frustration on the part of other members (Galanes & Adams, 2023).

Action-oriented listeners, by comparison, prefer to focus on tasks that they and their fellow communicators have set for themselves. Action-oriented listeners will generally retain and share details and information that they believe will keep a group moving.

Content-oriented listeners are those who care particularly about the specifics of a group's discussions. They tend to seek, provide, and analyze information that has been gathered through research. What they primarily choose to hear and to share with others in the group, thus, is material that they consider to be factual.

Time-oriented listeners concern themselves above all with how a group's activities fit into a calendar or schedule. They may listen and watch especially for signs that other group members want to accelerate the pace of the group's activities. Their preference is usually for short, concise messages rather than extended ones.

In the real world, few people fit neatly and completely into a single category within Galanes and Adams's typology of listeners. Instead, each of us embodies a mixture of the four preferences depending on the topic a group is dealing with, the developmental stage of the group, and other factors (Adler & Towne, 2002).

How to Be a Bad Listener

There are many ways to be a bad listener. Poor listening behavior can negatively affect group participation and dynamics in a variety of ways. Think about groups that you've been a part of that were ineffective. Do you think any of the following listening behaviors may have negatively impacted the group?

- **Pseudo-Listening:** You've seen this many times in your own life, and probably you've even done it. It's the act of seeming to be listening while your mind is actually somewhere else. When you're pseudo-listening, you may nod your head and emit periodic sounds of approval, just as you would if you were really paying attention, but those actions are for show.
- **Stage-Hogging:** Also known as disruptive listening, is an active behavior. However, the action isn't good, since the listener attends only minimally to what the other person is saying, butts in persistently and repeatedly to insert their own views or express their own needs.
- **Selective Listening:** Among human beings, it consists of listening only to the parts of someone else's communication that are personally important to us, even though we could certainly understand and respond to the rest of it if we chose to.
- **Insulated Listening:** This is, in a way, the reverse of selective listening. In this self-protective behavior, the listener takes in and responds actively to everything the speaker says *except* what's unpleasant to them.
- **Defensive Listening:** This type of listening is performed by a person when they interpret much or most of another person's statements as being personal attacks. A defensive listener is apt to ignore, exclude, or fail to interpret parts of a speaker's comments accurately.
- **Face-Value Listening:** This listening can be described as aural nitpicking. That is to say, the face-value listener pays a great deal of attention to the terminology of someone else's message and very little to the person's intentions or feelings.

Challenges of Listening in a Group

Although all of us get practice at it for years as students and eventually as employees, listening in a group isn't easy. It presents more of a challenge to each member, in fact, than does listening to one other person at a time. Why? We'll consider seven reasons, all of which stem from the inherent differences between groups and pairs of people.

First, in a typical one-on-one conversation, you're probably going to listen about 50% of the time, right? Compare that to your participation in a group, in which you're likely to spend between 65% and 90% of your time listening (Steil et al., 1997). Steil says that listening training is the key to success in today's organizations. You need to adapt different strategies when listening in a group. If you listen with the same depth of energy and concentration in the group that you do with a single conversation partner, you're going to get tired out a lot more quickly (Steil, 1996).

Second, unless you know each of the other members of a group very well, you may not adequately gauge their knowledge and perspectives on a given topic before it's discussed. This may make you less likely to be receptive and responsive to their views on a topic, especially a contentious one. You may also have to work harder to understand their viewpoints.

Third, it may be difficult to keep up with changing levels of engagement on the part of other members of your group. People's attention and involvement may fluctuate because they're anxious about the circumstances of a discussion, about a particular message that's being sent, or even about extraneous factors in their lives that come to mind. At some moments in a group's activities, everyone may be attentive and actively involved; at others, they come and go both mentally and physically. Because all the members are rarely simultaneously "firing on all cylinders," you'll need to work particularly hard to distinguish between vital messages and routine, mundane, or irrelevant ones.

Fourth, in a group, you have less of an opportunity to influence others' thoughts and actions than you do in one-on-one communication. Deciding when to cease listening and interject your viewpoints so that they'll be most likely to be received positively by the largest possible proportion of group members is hard, especially if the conversation is fast and free-wheeling.

Fifth, listening for long periods prevents you from releasing some of your own energy. Because you speak less in a group than in a one-on-one conversation, this build-up of energy may frustrate you and interfere with your ability to process what other people are saying.

Sixth, in a group, you have lots of time to daydream. People talk at about 100–150 words per minute, but your mind can process information at up to 600 words a minute (Wolvin & Coakley, 1988).

You may not be compelled or feel a need to listen actively all the time that a group is interacting, nor do you have to worry about other people's assessment of your behavior if you're not the one speaking at a particular time. Thus, you'll be able to fill in the gap between other people's talking speed and your own thinking speed with thoughts of your choice...or with thoughts that just float into and out of your consciousness. You may even be tempted to surreptitiously glance at reading material unrelated to the group's activities, or to send or receive text messages.

Seventh, it may be harder to listen in a group because of the existence of social loafing. This is the tendency for each member to devote less energy to a task than they would alone because it's possible to let others take responsibility for getting things done.

Poor listening in a group can lead to serious negative consequences. Take the case of a group numbering six members. Every time it has to retrace its ground for five minutes and repeat things because of poor listening, that's 30 minutes wasted. Furthermore, misunderstandings among group members can be spread and magnified outside the group to the point that its image and effectiveness are weakened. Here's an example of a group that may have a hard time listening. Their table seems to be in the middle of a lot of activity. Visual and verbal stimuli can distract even the most dedicated listener.



Figure 8.5.1: The speaker in this group is competing with a lot of visual and verbal stimuli for their listeners' attention. (CC BY-SA 3.0; geraldshields11 via Wikimedia Commons)

Advantages of Listening in a Group

Now that we've reviewed some of its challenges and pitfalls, we should note that listening in a group offers potential benefits as well. Let's consider two major kinds.

The first big advantage to listening in a group is that it embodies the possibility of taking one of the characteristics that we earlier said could be used negatively—i.e., that you have time and opportunity to think about and react to what you hear—and using it in a positive way. Rather than using that surplus time to daydream or plan a rebuttal to other group members' messages, you can try in your mind to empathetically interpret the messages and decide whether and how to respond in ways that promote the well-being of the speakers and the whole group.

The second advantage of listening in groups is a product of the fact that there will always be more diverse perspectives and more interaction in a group than in a dyad. People can be fascinating, can't they? And many times, the product of discussion among different people, with their different backgrounds and values, is something entirely unexpected. What this means, if you're a curious person at all, is that you should find lots to keep you entertained and educated as you listen to people in a group setting.

Listening in Online Groups

Online groups can communicate either synchronously or asynchronously; that is, in real-time or with delays between messages. If you use synchronous tools, such as Zoom or some other form of audio or video conferencing, the same challenges and advantages apply to online groups that we've already presented. The only difference may be that you and the other group participants aren't physically in the same place, which means that much of the nonverbal messages being sent are missed or not even on camera. For example, if a group member is nervously tapping their foot or fiddling with a ring or bracelet, that would be apparent in a face-to-face setting and could be acted upon in the moment or outside of the meeting by an observant leader or fellow group member. But these anxious gestures are easily hidden from other group members in an online group. Because the nervousness of the group member is not even observed, the effectiveness of that group member and potentially the entire group could be negatively affected. As a result, group members who exchange oral messages asynchronously may confront more intense pros and cons (Davis et al., 2004).

The good news is that you'll have even more time than in a face-to-face group discussion to review and think about messages before reacting to them, which may yield wiser and calmer responses. The bad news is that the freshness and spontaneity of listening to each other's comments in real-time will be lost, which could tend to homogenize people's attitudes and make it less likely for "aha moments" to take place.

Become a Better Listener

Let's review two fundamental points before we discuss specific steps for listening well in your group.

The first point is that before you can listen, you have to stop talking. This might seem self-evident, but in a culture like that of the United States, in which talking is highly valued, we may tend to overlook it.

The second point, though less obvious, is just as important. It is that both senders and receivers—both speakers and listeners—are responsible for effective listening. Listening actually transcends the mere reception of messages by listeners and imposes obligations on both senders and receivers. Senders should choose their messages according to the context or occasion. Furthermore, they should consider what media they will use to communicate that information, such as face-to-face interaction or synchronous or asynchronous transmissions, and be mindful of the implications of their selection.

For their part, receivers must make an effort to listen, be prepared to provide feedback, and manage their responses to ensure relevance and civility. They should also practice what Beebe, Beebe, and Ivy labeled "social decentering"—i.e., "stepping away from your own thoughts and attempting to experience the thoughts of others" (Beebe et al., 2005).

> The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer.
>
> Henry David Thoreau
>
> (Thoreau, 1863)

The Physical Side of Listening

As we've already pointed out, good listening is an active process. As such, it requires energy. In fact, listening is work—and not just mental work, either. To do the work of listening, which generally consumes the majority of your time whenever you interact with a group, you should be sure you're physically primed and ready to go. To confirm that your body is really prepared for high-quality listening, you should first check your posture. Assuming that you're seated, sit up straight and lean slightly forward. Not only does good posture allow you to remain relaxed and alert, but it also makes it more likely that other people will see you as competent and confident (Burgoon & Saine, 1978).

Next, notice your breathing. Be sure you're inhaling and exhaling deeply. Also, identify any aches or pains that may interfere with your ability to take in other people's messages. See if you can shift into a position that will allow you to remain comfortable and attentive throughout the communication process.

Pre-listening

How much time and effort you put into getting ready to listen will depend, among other things, on what kind of group you're in, how well you and the other members know each other, and what topics you're dealing with. Sometimes you're talking about light or superficial matters like "Where should we go eat after the meeting?" In those circumstances, you can just dive into a conversation without any particular thought to getting ready to listen.

There will be occasions, however, when you ought to stop, consider, and plan your listening carefully. Let's say you're in a student government group considering requests for activity fee money, for instance, or a screening committee involved in hiring a new person to join your business. In cases like these, when careful, accurate listening will be at a premium, put in the effort.

Try This 8.5.1 How to Prepare to Listen Well

- **Assign listening tasks to people:** Because social loafing is more likely when members aren't held accountable for their behavior, you may want to ask individuals to listen for different kinds of information or divide a long period of listening into segments, each of which has a designated "major listener" (Thompson, 2008).
- **Confirm (or reconfirm) your group's "listening" norms:** Remind yourselves about how you plan to take turns speaking.
- **Identify any potential contextual barriers to listening (Kelly, 2006):** Such barriers may include the location in which you're communicating and the cultural identity of group members.

- **Decide whether it's all right for group members to take notes:** This can also include audio recordings during the upcoming communication. If it is, decide whether you'd like to name one or more members "primary note-takers" or recorders.
- **Determine how often and when you plan to take breaks:** Even though parts of a lengthy discussion may be engrossing, when the time for a scheduled break comes, everyone's listening ability will probably be rejuvenated if you give members an opportunity to make a quick call, grab a cup of coffee, or just stand and stretch before proceeding.

Listening Itself

All right. Let's say the members of your group have physically and mentally readied themselves to listen, and you've begun a discussion. What do you need to do as the process unfolds? Here are some important dos and don'ts:

Tips to be a Better Listener

- **Determine your purpose in listening and keep it in mind:** Thinking back to earlier in this chapter, are you listening to acquire information, to evaluate messages, to relax and enjoy ourselves, or to demonstrate empathy?
- **Identify the levels at which group members are communicating their messages:** e.g., emotional, political, or intellectual.
- **Assess the relative significance of people's comments:** Also listen for main ideas rather than trying to take in everything on an equal plane. To help you do this, you may want, from time to time, to mentally summarize the message(s) you're listening to.
- **When possible and appropriate, urge other members of the group to speak:** Pay particular attention to those who are less dominant. Say things like "Please go on," "Tell me more," "Care to expand on that?" Remember that each person has a unique perspective that can add to the group's ability to consider ideas and make decisions.
- **"Listen with your eyes":** Observe people's body language and other nonverbal cues carefully, since those physical manifestations may add to or sometimes contradict their spoken words.
- **Show interest in others' messages through your own nonverbal actions:** Establish and maintain eye contact. Smile. Adopt an open posture. Avoid fidgeting or slouching.
- **Use "interactive questioning" (Lumsden & Lumsden, 2004):** Ask open-minded and open-ended questions to clarify ideas & information; to probe a speaker's reasoning and evidence; and to expand incomplete information. Use and ask for examples so that the speaker can connect your questions with their own world of experiences.
- **Use tentative clarifying/confirming statements:** Use phrases like, "It sounds like…"; "You seem to think that…"; "As I get it, you…"
- **Make polite, "targeted" interruptions to get answers to pressing questions:** Or, if you'd like, establish your place in line to speak next. However, be judicious and infrequent with interruptions (Lumsden & Lumsden, 2004).
- **Paraphrase:** Don't just see if you can accurately reflect what a person is saying; see if you can determine if your understanding of the person's "inner world" is accurate and whether you see things as the other person is experiencing them at the moment.
- **Respond after listening, sincerely and constructively:** Focus on content, ideas, & analysis rather than on personal matters.
- **Allow for, and be careful how you interpret silence:** Keep in mind that people may have many reasons, positive or otherwise, for not speaking at a particular time.

Try This 8.5.2 Tips on What to Avoid as a Listener

- **Let listening be a dead end:** This is when you receive messages and don't react at all.
- **Allow the listening behavior of others to sway your own:** If they're inattentive, don't lose your own focus; if they're especially positive or negative, don't lose your objectivity or critical ability.
- **Cut off or put down a speaker:** You not only risk offending the speaker, but this behavior may reduce the effectiveness of the interaction.
- **Interrupt excessively:** While your interruptions may be due to an enthusiasm for the topic, your behavior could negatively affect the conversation.
- **Pose "counterfeit questions":** These types of belligerent statements are masquerading as questions simply because they end with question marks.

- **Allow the tone of someone's message to affect your reaction:** This can include how agreeable or disagreeable you find the person to be. Allowing your opinion about the person to color your interpretation or reactions to it can negatively impact clear communication.
- **Express your interpretations of other people's messages excessively:** Why not? First of all, your interpretation may be wrong. Second, even if you're right, you may arouse a defensive reaction that in turn leads to unproductive argumentation.

No matter how often you listen to people, and no matter how many groups you may be part of, each new listening situation will be unique. It's your responsibility, shared with your fellow group members, to see that in each new conversation or discussion, you exercise proper practices and skills in your listening.

Key Takeaways

- Listening goes beyond hearing; it requires attention, interpretation, and understanding of group members' perspectives to build effective communication.
- Active listening in groups helps reduce misunderstandings, strengthen group relationships, and improve the quality of group decision-making.
- People have different listening orientations, such as people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented, which shape how they process group messages.
- Poor listening behaviors, like pseudo-listening, stage-hogging, or selective listening, can harm collaboration and group effectiveness.
- Effective group listening requires both speakers and listeners to share responsibility by engaging fully, asking clarifying questions, and responding constructively.
- Listening in a group presents significant challenges but can also pay important dividends.

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8.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

Group communication is an essential skill in education, the workplace, and everyday life because collaboration with others is central to achieving shared goals. By studying how groups function, we can understand why some groups succeed while others struggle, and how to enhance group effectiveness. Groups offer unique advantages, including combining diverse perspectives, generating creative solutions, and distributing tasks efficiently. However, they also present challenges, such as conflicts, uneven participation, or a lack of focus. Understanding these dynamics allows individuals to leverage group strengths while minimizing potential drawbacks.

This chapter explored the nature of groups and how they operate in different contexts. We examined the stages of group development—from formation to completion—and discussed how members assume roles that influence group performance. These roles, whether leading, supporting, or challenging, shape group processes and outcomes. Understanding these roles equips students to contribute meaningfully and responsibly within any group setting.

Effective communication is at the heart of successful group interaction. Both verbal and nonverbal messages are critical for building understanding, fostering relationships, and managing conflict. Listening, in particular, ensures members feel valued and promotes trust, cooperation, and collaboration. By developing strong listening skills and paying attention to nonverbal cues, students can enhance their ability to navigate complex group dynamics.

Throughout this chapter, key concepts such as synergy, social loafing, groupthink, and group norms were highlighted, along with essential communication strategies like active listening and nonverbal awareness. Mastering these ideas will help students become more effective group members and leaders, capable of contributing to productive, cohesive, and high-functioning teams across academic, professional, and personal settings.

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8.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 8

8.4.3: Four Main Categories of Distance in Communication

The image is a series of four concentric circles, each shaped like a bubble expanding outward from a central point, a silhoutted cartoon figure walking. Each circle is shaded in a different color to make the zones distinct. The innermost circle is yellow and is the smallest, representing "intimate distance," the space reserved for very close relationships such as family members, partners, or very close friends. The next circle is orange and is somewhat larger representing "personal distance," used for conversations with friends or people we know well. Beyond that, a wider circle is depicted in blue representing "social distance," the range often used for acquaintances, classmates, or professional interactions. The outermost and largest bubble is green and represents "public distance," the space maintained when addressing groups, audiences, or strangers.

These bubbles represent the different distances people use in nonverbal communication, first outlined by communications social scientist Edward Hall in his research on proxemics, the study of how people use space in relation to one another. The image emphasizes that how large each zone feels or is applied depends greatly on cultural norms and expectations. For instance, some cultures prefer closer physical spacing in conversations, while others value more personal space.

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8.9: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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8.9.1: Exercises

8.1: Introducing Group Communication

1. Think of a group you belong to now or in the past. Identify a task the group accomplished that would have been difficult or impossible for an individual to achieve.
2. Describe an experience in which you observed people cooperating or collaborating when they might instead have competed. What do you believe motivated them to cooperate?
3. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of working in a group. How can friendship, support, and building relationships improve group unity and teamwork? What challenges might arise in group communication that lead to conflicts or trust issues among members?
4. Explore the advantages of group communication in terms of sharing information, diverse perspectives, and teamwork. How can group collaboration lead to more thorough discussions, innovative ideas, and a deeper understanding of complex topics? List examples of successful group tasks that highlight the benefits of working together.
5. Analyze the downsides of group work, such as time-consuming discussions, coordination issues, and obstacles to efficiency. How can issues like social loafing, groupthink, and lack of diverse viewpoints hinder group performance and goal achievement? Consider ways to overcome these challenges in group communication.

8.2: The Nature of Groups

1. Imagine you are starting a new job and going through the stages of group development as outlined by Tuckman's model. Describe how you would navigate the forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning stages in a new work environment. List the challenges and opportunities you might encounter at each stage.
2. Consider the life cycle of group member roles from potential member to ex-member. Reflect on your experiences transitioning through different roles within a group setting. Describe how your behaviors and interactions change as you move from one role to another and the impact on group dynamics.
3. Review the positive and negative member roles within a group context. Think about how behaviors like dominating conversations, focusing on differences, or becoming disengaged can influence group communication and productivity. Provide examples of how positive and negative member roles can impact group dynamics and outcomes.
4. Explore the concept of group socialization and its role in shaping individual behaviors and interactions within a group. How do language, culture, and values influence group dynamics and communication patterns? List strategies for effective group socialization and relationship-building in diverse group settings.
5. Watch the film "12 Angry Men." Reflect on the group communication concepts exhibited by group members. Which ones caused dissension and blocked progress toward their goal? Which ones enhanced the group and helped them make progress toward their goal?

8.3: Understanding Group Communication

1. Choose a scenario where groupthink could potentially occur. Develop a plan outlining strategies to prevent groupthink and encourage diverse viewpoints within the group. Explain how these strategies align with Tubbs' emphasis on conflict as a necessary stage in group communication.
2. Think about a recent group project or activity you were involved in and identify specific behaviors or actions that contributed to the group's effectiveness or ineffectiveness based on the traits outlined in Tubbs' theory. What impact do you think that had on the group's productivity?
3. If you were the leader of a group, what strategies could you use to encourage equal participation, foster interdependence, promote active listening, and assess group progress?
4. Reflect on a group experience where implicit norms played a significant role in shaping the group's dynamics. How did these unspoken norms influence communication patterns, decision-making processes, and overall group cohesion? Consider the challenges of identifying and addressing implicit norms within a group setting.
5. Consider the influence of language and cultural backgrounds on group communication. Reflect on a time when language barriers or cultural differences affected communication within a group you were part of. How did these factors shape perceptions, interpretations, and interactions among group members? Explore strategies for overcoming language and cultural barriers to enhance group communication effectiveness.

8.4: Nonverbal Communication in Groups

1. Watch a group interaction, either in person or through a video, and identify at least three different nonverbal communication behaviors. Write a short reflection on how these nonverbal cues influenced the group dynamics.
2. Go out into your community and observe different nonverbal communication behaviors in various settings, such as a cafe, park, or public transportation. Take notes on the different types of nonverbal cues you observe and discuss them in your next class.
3. Pair up with a classmate and create a role-play scenario where one person communicates a message using only nonverbal cues, while the other person tries to interpret the message. Switch roles and discuss the challenges and successes of communicating nonverbally.
4. Observe group nonverbal communication norms in a culture different from your own. Write a reflection of how the nonverbal communication is different from your own culture. Could any of these differences cause miscommunication in groups?
5. Keep a journal for a day where you record your own nonverbal behaviors and how they influence your interactions with others. Reflect on any patterns you notice and how you can improve your nonverbal communication skills.

8.5: Listening in Groups

1. Watch a video of a group discussion and identify instances of good and poor listening behaviors. Make a list of how these behaviors influenced the overall effectiveness of the group communication.
2. Keep a journal for a week where you record instances of effective listening in group settings. Reflect on how active listening contributes to successful group outcomes.
3. Create a list of common challenges faced when listening in a group. Brainstorm strategies to overcome these challenges and improve group communication.
4. Pick two groups of which you're a member. How would you compare the level of participation of their members in group discussions? How do their members' listening practices compare? In which group do you find it harder to function as a listener? Why?
5. "To become a leader, you need to talk; to stay a leader, you need to listen." Do you agree, or not? What examples can you give to support your viewpoint?

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8.9.2: Discussion Questions

8.1: Introducing Group Communication

1. How do the four outcomes of group communication - taking turns, sharing time, less intimacy, and time-consuming efforts - affect group interactions and results? Share examples from your experiences to show how these outcomes influence group dynamics and communication.
2. Explore the advantages of group communication in terms of sharing information, diverse perspectives, and teamwork. How can group collaboration lead to more thorough discussions, innovative ideas, and deeper understanding of complex topics? Share examples of successful group tasks that highlight the benefits of working together.
3. Analyze the downsides of group work, such as time-consuming discussions, coordination issues, and obstacles to efficiency. How can issues like social loafing, groupthink, and lack of diverse viewpoints hinder group performance and goal achievement? Discuss ways to overcome these challenges in group communication.
4. Evaluate the role of communication skills in maximizing the benefits and minimizing the drawbacks of group interaction. How can individuals contribute to successful group communication by improving turn-taking, time-sharing, building relationships, and achieving group goals? Discuss the importance of self-awareness, adaptability, and teamwork in enhancing group dynamics and achieving desired results.

8.2: The Nature of Groups

1. Imagine you are all members in a new group that is forming according to Tuckman's model of group development. How would you navigate the stages of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning in this group context? What strategies would you use to build relationships, resolve conflicts, and achieve group goals at each stage?
2. Reflect on your experiences transitioning through different member roles within a group, from potential member to ex-member. How do these roles impact group dynamics and communication patterns? Discuss the behaviors and interactions associated with each role and their influence on group cohesion and productivity.
3. Analyze the positive and negative member roles within a group setting and their impact on group communication and performance. How can dominating conversations, focusing on differences, or becoming disengaged affect group dynamics? Share strategies for promoting positive member roles and addressing negative behaviors in group interactions.
4. Explore the concept of group socialization and its significance in shaping individual behaviors and interactions within a group. How do language, culture, and values influence group dynamics and communication patterns? Discuss the importance of effective group socialization in fostering positive relationships and enhancing group cohesion.

8.3: Understanding Group Communication

1. How can the presence of conflict within a group be beneficial in preventing groupthink and promoting diverse perspectives? Share examples from your own experiences or observations.
2. In what ways can group members actively contribute to strengthening their group dynamics and communication effectiveness? Discuss specific behaviors or strategies that align with Tubbs' recommendations for effective group communication.
3. As a leader, how can you create a supportive environment that encourages equal participation, active listening, and constructive feedback within a group? Share leadership practices that can help foster a healthy group dynamic.
4. How do implicit norms differ from explicit norms in a group setting, and what role do they play in shaping group behavior and communication patterns? Share examples of implicit and explicit norms you have observed in various group contexts and discuss their impact on group dynamics.
5. In what ways can group members navigate cultural differences and language barriers to improve communication and collaboration within a diverse group? How can an understanding of different cultural backgrounds and communication styles enhance group cohesion and productivity? Share strategies for promoting cross-cultural communication in group settings.

8.4: Nonverbal Communication in Groups

1. How do affect displays and adaptors contribute to the overall effectiveness of group communication? Provide examples from

your own experiences or observations.
2. Why is it important to consider cultural differences in nonverbal communication when interacting with diverse groups? How can awareness of cultural norms improve cross-cultural communication?
3. Discuss the concept of masking in nonverbal communication. When might masking be necessary in a group setting, and what are the potential consequences of conflicting nonverbal and verbal messages?
4. How can nonverbal communication be used to establish trust and build relationships within a group? Share examples of how nonverbal cues have influenced your perceptions of others in group settings.
5. Explore the role of paralanguage in nonverbal communication. How does tone, intensity, and pausing impact the meaning of verbal messages? Share examples of how paralanguage can enhance or detract from effective communication in a group setting.

8.5: Listening in Groups

1. How do different listening styles (action-oriented, content-oriented, time-oriented) influence group dynamics and decision-making processes?
2. What are the consequences of poor listening behaviors, such as pseudo-listening and selective listening, on group communication and collaboration?
3. How can understanding the challenges of listening in a group help individuals become more effective communicators and team members?
4. In what ways can technology impact listening in online group discussions? What strategies can be employed to mitigate the challenges of virtual communication?
5. How can pre-listening strategies, such as assigning listening tasks and setting communication norms, enhance the quality of group interactions and decision-making processes?

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9: DYNAMICS OF GROUP COMMUNICATION

Overview

Group communication examines how individuals interact, influence one another, and coordinate efforts to achieve shared goals. In classrooms, workplaces, and community organizations, group dynamics shape how work gets done and how members experience collaboration. This chapter introduces the foundational element of member roles which help structure participation and expectations. For example, a task-oriented member may focus on keeping a project on schedule, while a relational member works to maintain positive group morale. The chapter also explores group problem solving and decision making, including methods such as brainstorming or consensus building, which allow groups to generate ideas and evaluate options effectively.

Leadership is another central influence on group communication. This chapter examines leadership roles and major leadership theories to explain how influence emerges within groups. For instance, a transformational leader may motivate members by articulating a shared vision, while a situational leader focuses on guiding discussion and ensuring all voices are heard. Practical skills such as facilitating meetings are emphasized, including setting agendas, managing time, and summarizing key points to maintain clarity and momentum. These skills help groups stay focused and productive, whether planning a class presentation or coordinating a workplace project.

Since disagreement is inevitable, the chapter also addresses conflict in groups. You will learn about common conflict styles and how each affects group outcomes. For example, an integrating style can lead to creative solutions when members openly share perspectives, while an avoiding style may delay necessary decisions. Conflict management strategies, including active listening and problem-focused discussion, help groups manage tension constructively.

Finally, the chapter addresses intercultural communication within groups. We will learn about how group dynamics are influenced by cultural variations in verbal and nonverbal cues, including differences in eye contact, silence, and directness. By comprehending and respecting these cultural nuances, groups can mitigate misunderstandings, enhance unity, and facilitate more efficient communication in diverse environments. Understanding and adapting to cultural differences in communication strategies fosters a collaborative group dynamic, promoting mutual understanding and successful interactions across cultural boundaries.

Chapter Goals

- Explain how group communication and dynamics influence collaboration and goal achievement in a variety of settings.
- Identify group roles and norms and analyze how they shape participation, expectations, and group effectiveness.
- Apply group problem-solving and decision-making methods, such as brainstorming and consensus building, to evaluate options.
- Compare leadership roles and theories and demonstrate meeting facilitation skills that support productive group interaction.
- Analyze conflict styles, conflict management strategies, and cultural communication differences to improve collaboration in diverse groups

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- A plop
- Assertion conflict style
- Averaging
- Blocker role

- Building and maintenance roles
- Collectivist cultures
- Conflict
- Conflict management strategies
- Consensus
- Controlling conflict style
- Cooperative conflict style
- Culture
- Decision-making
- Delegation to an Expert
- Direct aggression conflict style
- Direct cultures
- Ethnocentrism
- Explicit rule culture
- Face-detracting strategies
- Face-saving strategies
- Functional leadership
- High power distance cultures
- Implicit rule culture
- Individualistic cultures
- Indirect communication conflict style
- Indirect cultures
- Intercultural communication
- Long-term orientation
- Low power distance cultures
- Monochronic time-oriented cultures
- Nonassertion conflict style
- Nonconfrontational conflict style
- Participative leader
- Passive aggression conflict style
- Polychronic time-oriented cultures
- Principles on conflict
- The problem-solving process
- Self-centered roles
- Short-term orientation
- Situational leadership
- Socio-emotional roles
- Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum
- Task roles
- Tension-reliever role
- Transformational leadership
- Universal leadership
- Voting

9.1: Group Member Roles

9.2: Leadership in Groups

9.3: Group Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

9.4: Conflict Management in Groups

9.5: Intercultural Communication in Groups

9.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

9.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 9

9.8: References

9.9: Teacher Resources

9.9.1: Exercises
9.9.2: Discussion Questions

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9.1: Group Member Roles

Group Roles

We have looked at the purpose and importance of group roles as well as their life cycle. Now let's explore group roles in more detail. While we may not be able to choose whether we have the role of leader or recorder in our group, we can all choose whether to take on a productive or non-productive group role.

Benne and Sheats (1948) focused on studying small discussion groups that engaged in problem-solving activities. From their observations, they proposed three distinct types of roles: task, building and maintenance, and self-centered. **Task roles** were identified by facilitating and co-coordinating behaviors such as suggesting new ideas or ways of solving problems. **Building and maintenance roles** involved encouragement, including praise, statements of agreement, or acceptance of others and their contributions nonverbally or verbally. **Self-centered roles** involved ego-centric behaviors that call attention to the individual, not the group, and distract or disrupt the group dynamic (Benne & Sheats, 1948).

Group Task Roles

- Coordinator: facilitates order and progress
- Evaluator-critic: analyzes suggestions for strengths and weaknesses
- Orienter: focuses on group progress, recaps discussions
- Recorder: takes notes on the group discussions, important decisions, and commitments to action

Group Building and Maintenance Roles

- Supporter: Encourages everyone, making sure they have what they need to get the job done
- Harmonizer: Helps manage conflict within the group, facilitating common ground, helping define terms, and contributing to consensus
- Tension-releaser: Uses humor and light-hearted remarks, as well as nonverbal demonstrations (brings a plate of cookies to the group), to reduce tensions and work-related stress
- Compromiser: Focuses on common ground, common points of agreement, and helps formulate an action plan that brings everyone together towards a common goal, task, or activity
- Standard Setter: Sets the standard for conduct and helps influence the behavior of group members

Self-Centered Roles

- Aggressor: Belittles other group members
- Blocker: Frequently raises objections
- Deserter: Abandons the group or is very unreliable
- Dominator: Demand control and attention
- Recognition-seeker: Frequently seeks praise
- Confessor: Uses the group to discuss personal problems
- Joker or Clown: Frequent use of distracting humor, often attention-seeking behavior.

There's another way to categorize group roles and their impact on group dynamics. Bales (Bales, 1950) built on their research and analyzed interaction from two categorical perspectives: task-orientation and socio-emotional. Belbin's (Belbin, 1981) work on successful teams focused on the number of team members in a group and their respective roles.

Example 9.1.1 The Importance of Roles

In this family-owned bakery, task-oriented roles focus on completing objectives such as improving efficiency or meeting sales goals. **Socio-emotional roles** support relationships amongst the employees by reducing stress and encouraging cooperation. Owners Lorenzo and Rosa see both role types as essential for maintaining productivity and a positive

communication climate. For instance, during a staff meeting focused on improving workflow during busy morning hours, Lorenzo and Rosa each demonstrate a **participative leader** role by inviting the bakers and cashiers to share observations about bottlenecks. As leaders, they encourage joint problem-solving rather than imposing a solution, which increases member involvement and reinforces cohesion. However, the group is not ideal. One employee adopts a **blocker role** by dismissing suggestions for adjusting scheduling or the baked goods offered, repeatedly arguing that “nothing will work” without offering alternative ideas. This behavior slows decision-making and creates frustration among team members. As tension rises due to time pressure and disagreement, another employee assumes a **tension-reliever role** by making light, appropriate humor, reminding the group that challenges are temporary and manageable. By easing emotional strain, this role helps restore focus and encourages continued participation. As a result, Lorenzo and Rosa, together with their team, develop a workable solution that makes the bakery's busy morning hours more efficient and enjoyable for both employees and customers.

No matter what the goals or context of a group, different group roles influence communication climate, decision quality, and progress toward organizational goals.

> "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."
>
> —Charles R. Swindoll (1987)

This example works for a task-oriented group, where it's all about progress toward achieving the goal. It's all about the effectiveness of the team. However, this approach does not explore what it means to be a healthy family or a productive community, though each type of group is related to this discussion.

If someone in your group always makes everyone laugh, that can be a distinct asset when the news is less than positive. At times when you have to get work done, however, the class clown may become a distraction. Notions of what is positive and what is negative will often depend on the context when discussing groups. Table 9.1.1 and Table 9.1.2 list both positive and negative roles people sometimes play in a group setting based on the work of Benne and Sheats (1948) and McLean (2005).

Table 1: Positive Roles

Initiator—Coordinator	Suggests new ideas or new ways of looking at the problem
Elaborator	Builds on ideas and provides examples
Coordinator	Brings ideas, information, and suggestions together
Evaluator-Critic	Evaluates ideas and provides constructive criticism
Recorder	Records ideas, examples, suggestions, and critiques

Table 9.1.1 Benne, K. D., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members in small discussion groups. The Journal of Social Issues, 4(2), 41-49. Benne, K. D., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. Journal of Social Issues, 37, 41–49. McLean, S. (2005). The basics of interpersonal communication. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Table 9.1.2: Negative Roles

Dominator	Dominates discussion, not allowing others to take their turn
Recognition Seeker	Relates discussion to their accomplishments, seeks attention
Special-Interest Pleader	Relates discussion to special interest or personal agenda
Blocker	Blocks attempts at consensus consistently
Joker or Clown	Seeks attention through humor and distracts group members

Table 9.1.2 Benne, K. D., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members in small discussion groups. The Journal of Social Issues, 4(2), 41-49. Benne, K. D., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. Journal of Social Issues, 37, 41–49. McLean, S. (2005). The basics of interpersonal communication. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Group members' roles and norms shape interaction, productivity, and group effectiveness. The foundational work of Benne and Sheats demonstrates the importance of understanding the positive and negative contributions of the task roles, building

and maintenance roles, and self-centered roles. Their work emphasizes that while assigned positions may be fixed, individuals can choose how productively they participate. Task roles support problem solving and goal achievement, while building and maintenance roles foster encouragement, cohesion, and a positive communication climate. Self-centered roles, by contrast, focus on individual needs and often disrupt group functioning. Later research by Bales and Belbin further highlights the balance between task-oriented and socio-emotional interaction in successful groups. The effectiveness of group members' roles depends on context, group goals, and communication norms, which influence group health and outcomes.

Key Takeaways

- Individuals can choose to engage in productive or self-centered roles, affecting group communication, cohesion, and goal achievement.
- Task roles focus on problem-solving and progress, while building and maintenance roles support relationships, encouragement, and a positive communication climate.
- Self-centered roles often disrupt group functioning, highlighting the importance of awareness and active choice in group participation.

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9.2: Leadership in Groups

What Is a Leader?

As globalization increases and our interconnected world becomes smaller, there is a growing appreciation for the role of an effective leader in terms of vision, success, and overall organizational effectiveness. Leaders are required to possess increasingly complex skill sets and are expected to effectively communicate with individuals, groups, and teams, and within and between organizations.

> "Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge."
>
> —Simon Sinek (2009)

Leadership Theories

There are many perspectives on leadership, but they generally fall into four main categories: leadership traits, situational or context-based leadership, functional leadership, and transformational leadership. Let's examine each in turn.

Universal Leadership

The first approach we'll consider is the oldest of all: **universal leadership** traits, or the view that there are inherent traits that may be part of a person from birth, as in talents, or acquired skills that express those inborn traits, that are somehow universal or constant across contexts and cultures. It is a significant challenge to even begin to consider the many contexts where leadership might be displayed, and so instead of focusing on the context, in this view, we focus on the individual and their traits. Some studies, such as those conducted by Bass (1981) and Baker (1990), give us a qualitative and quantitative analysis of verbal style and the elimination of potential leaders in small groups. Results indicate that people in leadership possess the following ten traits, as indicated in Table 9.2.1.

Table 9.2.1: Universal Leadership Traits

Trait	Explanation	Example
Achievement Orientation	A clear focus on achievement	She consistently makes time in her busy schedule for her schoolwork. She is focused on completing her degree.
Adaptability	The ability to adapt to the context, including constraints or resources, to be successful	She understands the challenges of running a household and raising children on a budget, and still makes her studies a priority.
Energy	The ability to devote time, concentration, and effort to a challenge	Even though she is tired in the evening she makes time, after the children have gone to bed, to complete her studies each night.
Intelligence	The ability to perceive, understand, formulate a response to, and implement a plan of action to solve a challenge	There are never enough hours in the day, but she understands the challenges, sets priorities, and consistently gets the job done.
Innovation	The ability to perceive alternate plans of action to achieve similar or improved results	She understands the challenge and finds a faster, more efficient way to get the job done.
Persistence	The ability to persevere, or to stick with a challenge until it is solved.	She consistently completes her work on time, has completed all of her classes to date successfully, and is on track to graduate as planned.

Trait	Explanation	Example
Responsibility	The ability to respond and the awareness of duty, obligation, or commitment to solve a challenge	She knows she has the ability to respond to the many challenges, recognizes the importance of a university degree to herself and her children, and has completed her obligations.
Self-confidence	The confidence in one's ability to solve a challenge	She knows she can do it.
Sociability	The ability to interact with others effectively	She can work in groups effectively, even with challenging members.
Verbal Communication Ability	The ability to articulate effectively, or express one's thoughts, ideas, or opinions in ways that others can understand them with minimal or no miscommunication	She can express herself effectively. People understand her when she speaks.

Table 9.2.1 Bass, B. (1981). Traits of Leadership: A follow-up to 1970. In R.M. Stogdill (Ed.), Handbook of Leadership. New York: Free Press, pp. 73–96. Baker, D. (1990). A qualitative and quantitative analysis of verbal style and the elimination of potential leaders in small groups. Small Group Research, 38, pp. 13–26.

As we review these terms we can observe many of them in ourselves and others in daily life. Are leaders those who possess all ten traits? Are these ten traits the only traits that represent leadership? No on both counts. Leaders may possess or exhibit some or all of these traits, but not all the time in every context. In addition, what we consider leadership in one context might be considered insubordination in another. Cultures vary as to their expectations for leaders and what traits they must possess, and we learn culture from each other. We are not born with it. We learn to communicate from and with each other. We are not built with an innate ability to communicate and our surroundings, including those who model behaviors for us, influence how we communicate with ourselves and others. If we are raised in a community where people take responsibility for their challenges and work together to solve them, we are more likely to model that behavior. If we are raised in a community that looks to an institution or an individual to solve problems for them, we are more likely to expect our problems to be solved for us. Since we can see that our environment influences our communication, our culture, and these traits, let's examine alternatives as we continue to explore the concept of leadership.

Situational Leadership

Our second approach to leadership shifts the focus or attention from the individual to the context, or situation. **Situational leadership**, or leadership in context, means that leadership itself depends on the situation at hand. In sharp contrast to the "natural born leader," or "universal leadership traits" model of leadership we previously discussed, this viewpoint is relativist. Leadership is relative or varies, based on the context. There is no one "universal trait" to which we can point or a principle to which we can observe in action. There is no style of leadership that is more or less effective than another unless we consider the context. Then our challenge presents itself: how to match the most effective leadership strategy with the current context?

In order to match leadership strategies and context we first need to discuss the range of strategies as well as the range of contexts. We need to focus our efforts on factors that each context contains and look for patterns, or common trends, that help us make generalizations about our observations.

For example, an emergency situation may require a leader to be direct, giving specific orders to each person in the group with no time to seek team consensus. Let's say a company has a technical glitch in a project just before the launch into the marketplace. Time is of the essence. So in this situation, the leader takes charge to address the issue swiftly. Because of these time constraints, they make many decisions alone. Where needed, they delegate tasks to team members to coordinate with tech support to resolve the issue. This decisive leadership which could have been seen as negative in another situation, ensures focused efforts on resolving the critical problem efficiently. The leader's proactive approach and ability to make tough decisions under pressure ensure that the product launch is on target and the product success in the marketplace is enhanced.

Functional Leadership

Our third approach to consider is called **functional leadership**, or leadership that focuses on behaviors that address needs and helps the group achieve its goals. A number of communication experts have explored this area (Hackman & Walton, 1986; McGrath, 1962; Adair, 1988; Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

What this research shows is that the leader needs to assess needs, including task, team, and individual group member needs. Balance and performance are emphasized, and the time the leader spends on a specific approach varies based on their assessment of the area of need. The highest priority is completion of the task in this approach, but it is balanced against team and individual group member needs. Each activity or approach targets each area of need, and the leader focuses on it to emphasize the area, alternating their time on any given activity based on the existing needs.

Table 9.2.2: Functional Leadership

Task Need	Team Need	Individual Need
Assessing the situation	Training	Training and Coaching
Understanding the task	Building team spirit	Recognizing individual skills and abilities; leveraging them on the task
Preparing the plan to address the task	Focus on the mission; sense of purpose	Focus on the mission; sense of purpose
Implementing the plan addressing the task	Motivation, praise, and rewards	Motivation, praise, and rewards
Allocating time and resources to the task	Focus on the tempo or pace of performance	Fostering interdependence while respecting individual performance, including roles and tasks
Re-evaluating the plan and making adjustments	Status recognition or performance acknowledgement	Status recognition or performance acknowledgement
Understanding Quality Standards	Discipline, including sanctions and punishment	Attending to personal problems
Quality control	Quality Control	Individual output
Evaluating outcomes	Redirection, review of the action plan	Individual role and task review
Sharing the outcomes (Communication)	Facilitating group interactions (Communication)	Individual interaction (Communication)

Table 9.2.2 Hackman, J. R., & Walton, R. E. (1986). Leading groups in organizations. In P. S. Goodman (Ed.), Designing effective work groups (pp. 72–119). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. McGrath, J. E. (1962). Leadership behavior: Some requirements for leadership training. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Civil Service Commission. Adair, J. (1988). Effective Leadership. London: Pan Books. Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). The leadership challenge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

As indicated in Table 9.2.2, the functional leader focuses on the short and long-term needs of the group. If the group is lost, perhaps time invested in re-evaluating the plan and making adjustments, meeting a task and a team need at the same time, might prove effective. If an individual group member is struggling, perhaps supportive coaching and even additional training might yield results. Based on the leader's assessment of the needs, they will select the appropriate action and maintain a priority order. They will also be constantly attuned to change, ready to adapt and meet the ever-changing needs of the task, team, or individual.

Transformational Leadership

> "Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."
>
> —Attributed to Dwight D. Eisenhower

Our final approach to consider, called **transformational leadership**, emphasizes the vision, mission, motivations, and goals of a group or team and motivates them to accomplish the task or achieve the result. This model of leadership asserts that people will follow a person who inspires them, who clearly communicates their vision with passion, and helps get things done with energy and enthusiasm.

James MacGregor Burns, a presidential biographer, first introduced the concept, discussing the dynamic relationship between the leader and the followers, as they together motivate and advance towards the goal or objective (Burns, 1978). Bernard Bass contributed to Burns' theory, (Bass, 1985) suggesting there are four key components of transformation leadership, as shown in

Table 9.2.3.

Table 9.2.3: Four key components of Transformational Leadership

	Component of Transformational Leadership	Explanation
1	Intellectual Stimulation	Transformational leaders encourage creativity and ingenuity, challenging the status quo and encouraging followers to explore new approaches and opportunities.
2	Individualized Consideration	Transformational Leaders recognize and celebrate each follower's unique contributions to the group.
3	Inspirational Motivation	Transformational Leaders communicate a clear vision, helping followers understand the individual steps necessary to accomplish the task or objective while sharing in the anticipation of completion.
4	Idealized Influence	Transformational Leaders serve as role models, demonstrating expertise, skills, and talent that others seek to emulate, inspiring positive actions while reinforcing trust and respect.

Table 9.2.3 Bass, B. (1985). Leadership and Performance. New York: Free Press.

The leader conveys the group's goals and aspirations, displays passion for the challenge that lies ahead, and demonstrates a contagious enthusiasm that motivates group members to succeed. This approach focuses on the positive changes that need to occur in order for the group to be successful, and requires the leader to be energetic and involved with the process, even helping individual members complete their respective roles or tasks.

In this section, we have discussed leadership traits, situational leadership, functional leadership, and finally transformative leadership theories. We can recognize that there are no universal traits associated with leadership, but there are traits that are associated with it that we develop across time through our experiences. We can also recognize that the context or situation makes a significant impact on leadership, and matching the situation to the leadership approach requires skill and expertise. Every challenge is unique in some way, and the effective leader can recognize that aligning their actions and support with the needs of the group makes sense. The functional perspective requires a leader to assess task needs, group needs, and individual needs, and then devote time, energy, and resources to them in priority order. Finally, a transformative leadership approach involves an articulate leader with a clear vision that is shared with energy and enthusiasm with followers, encouraging them to embrace the steps required as well as the end goal, objective, or mission result. Each approach offers us a viewpoint to consider as we approach leadership in teams, and all serve as important insights into how to better lead an effective group.



Figure 9.2.1: As a facilitator leads a breakout group discussion at a conference she makes sure that all of the members are engaged. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Eyoungstrom via Wikimedia Commons)

Facilitating a Meeting

Make no mistake: facilitating a meeting well is difficult. It requires care, vigilance, flexibility, resilience, humility, and humor. Let's look at what the owner of a cupcake shop needs to do as they facilitate the planning meeting for a large order. Imagine a small group of employees gathering after closing to discuss plans for an upcoming large custom order for a wedding. The bride has given the owner detailed instructions and getting good reviews on their cupcakes could really boost sales. The owner knows they're going to need each employee to play their part. So the owner takes their role seriously as facilitator of the group's first planning meeting. As leader, the owner is paying close attention to how group members interact, ensuring that each person has an opportunity to contribute. When the discussion begins to drift or one member dominates the conversation, the facilitator redirects attention to the meeting agenda and the group's immediate objectives. As questions about timing or responsibilities arise, as facilitator they help clarify next steps so the group can reach a shared understanding. Because of all the details, the meeting becomes long. Anticipating a loss of focus and energy, the facilitator calls for a short break (with free cupcakes of course!) to help the group regroup and continue the discussion productively. This extra effort by the facilitator gets planning off to a good start, ensures everyone feels ownership of the process and will increase the likelihood that the cupcake shop will get those rave reviews on social media.

Guidelines for Facilitating a Meeting

Many authorities have recommended actions and attitudes which can help you facilitate a meeting well. Here are several such suggestions, taken partly from these writers' works as facilitators and participants in meetings over the years. These authors include J.K. Barge (Barge, 1991), G. Lumsden and D. Lumsden (Lumsden & Lumsden, 2004) and G. Parker and R. Hoffman (Parker & Hoffman 2006).

How to Have an Effective Meeting

- **Start Promptly... Always:** You will communicate that you take the work of the group seriously. You will also encourage prompt attendance when latecomers realize they've missed important information and/or decisions.
- **Begin with Something Positive:** This could be good news in the company like exceeding quarterly goals, or an end-of-year bonus. Or share something personal such as an engagement, new baby or promotion. Sharing with fellow group members reminds them in specific, personal terms their connection to one another and why their meetings can be truly worthwhile.
- **Tend to Housekeeping Details:** People's productivity depends in part on their biological state. Remind group members where they can find rest rooms, food and any other amenities and if the meeting will be long consider providing bottled water, coffee and light snacks.
- **Make Sure People Understand Their Roles:** At the start of the meeting, review the agenda and confirm that the expectations of the attendees match.
- **Keep to Your Agenda:** Once you have shared the agenda, stick to it. If you must deviate from the plan, tell the participants what you are doing and why.
- **Guide, Don't Dictate:** If you're in charge of the meeting, at times you can let other members of the group carry the content as long as they're not straying from the process you feel needs to be followed.
- **Keep Your Eyes Open for Nonverbal Communication:** As a meeting progresses, people's physical and emotional states are likely to change. When people do something as simple as crossing their arms in front of them, for instance, they might be signaling that they're closed to what others are saying, or they might just be trying to stay warm in a room that feels too cold to them. Watch how the rest of the group seems to respond to the speaker. You may want to do a perception check to see if you're interpreting nonverbal cues accurately. For instance, you might say, "Marina, could we pause here a bit? I get the impression that people might have some questions for you." As an alternative, you might address the whole group and ask "Does anyone have questions for Marina at this point?"
- **Capture and Assign Action Items:** Most meetings result in action items, tasks, and other assignments for one or more participants. Be sure these action steps and who they are assigned to is communicated verbally to the group and is recorded for reference later.
- **Take Breaks Regularly, Even When You Think You Don't Need Them:** People sometimes feel full of energy and clamor to keep a lively discussion going past the time scheduled for a break. Taking even five-minute breathers at set intervals can help group members remain physically refreshed and focused over the long haul.
- **Show Respect for Everyone:** Seek consensus. Avoid "groupthink" by encouraging a free and full airing of opinions. Listen sincerely to everyone. Keep disagreements agreeable. If you must criticize, criticize positions, not people.

- **Expect the Unexpected:** Do your best to anticipate and prepare for confrontations and conflicts. If you didn't already make time to do so earlier, take a minute just before the start of the meeting to mark items on your agenda which you think might turn out to be especially contentious or time-consuming.
- **Conduct Multiple Assessments of the Meeting:** Formative assessment takes place during an activity and allows people to modify their behavior in response to its results. For instance, "If we were to end this meeting right now, where would it be, and if we need to make changes now in what's happening in our meeting, what should they be?" Summative assessment is implemented at the end of an activity. When you finish a meeting, for example, you might check to see how well people feel that the gathering met its intended goals. Or you can send out an email asking attendees to give feedback.
- **Think (and Talk) Ahead:** Remind group members, before the meeting breaks up, of where and when their next gathering is to take place.

Tips For Virtual Meetings

Meetings conducted via video conference can function as efficiently as face-to-face ones, but only if the distinctive challenges of the virtual environment are taken into account.

How to Have an Effective Virtual Meeting

- At the start of the meeting remind attendees in a friendly manner of e-etiquette.
- Remind people of the purpose of the meeting and of the key outcome(s) you hope to achieve together.
- Listen/watch for people who aren't participating and ask them periodically if they have thoughts or suggestions to add to the discussion.
- Summarize the status of the meeting from time to time.
- Be flexible if an attendee is having connection issues. Be aware if that person drops out of the meeting and needs to be admitted again.
- Because you are limited in seeing nonverbal cues, ask other members to clarify their meanings and intentions if you're not sure their words alone convey all you need to know.
- If you know you're going to have to leave a meeting before it ends, inform the organizer in advance. Sign off publicly when you leave rather than just hanging up on the meeting connection.

Key Takeaways

- Effective leaders need complex skills and strong communication in our interconnected world for organizational success.
- Leadership theories cover traits, situational, functional, and transformational approaches to leadership.
- Facilitating meetings requires attention to group dynamics, communication, and task management for successful outcomes.
- Meeting guidelines include starting promptly, managing tasks, guiding discussions, and capturing action items for effective collaboration.

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9.3: Group Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

Groups Have Problems Too

No matter who you are or where you live, problems are an inevitable part of life. This is true for groups as well as for individuals. Some groups, especially work teams, are formed specifically to solve problems. Other groups encounter problems for a wide variety of reasons. Within a family group, a problem might be that a daughter or son wants to get married and the parents do not approve of the marriage partner. In a workgroup, a problem might be that some workers are putting in more effort than others, yet achieving poorer results. Regardless of the problem, having the resources of a group can be an advantage, as different people can contribute different ideas for how to reach a satisfactory solution. Effective groups often achieve outcomes that are greater than what any individual member could accomplish alone.

Problem-Solving

Once a group encounters a problem, the questions that come up range from “Where do we start?” to “How do we solve it?” While there are many ways to approach a problem, the American educational philosopher John Dewey’s reflective thinking sequence has stood the test of time. Possibly influenced by Dewey's work, the seven-step process developed by Robert Adler (Adler, 1996) has produced positive results and serves as a handy organizational structure. If you are a member of a group that needs to solve a problem and don’t know where to start, consider these seven simple steps, says Sarah McLean (McLean, 2005).

Steps in Problem-Solving

1. Define the problem
2. Analyze the problem
3. Establish criteria
4. Consider possible solutions
5. Decide on a solution
6. Implement the solution
7. Evaluate the solution

The Problem-Solving Process

Let’s discuss each step in **the problem-solving process** in detail.

Example 9.3.1 *Campus Coffee* has a problem.

In the following hypothetical example, *Campus Coffee,* a coffee shop located near a college campus, has declining sales. But neither the owner nor her staff knows why. They need to put time and energy into figuring out what to do so that *Campus Coffee* will be around for many years to come.



Figure 9.3.1: The owner and employees at *Campus Coffee* need to figure out how to increase sales so they can keep serving their customers. (CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain; Chevanon Photography via Wikimedia Commons)

The business is owned by Grace, who works full-time alongside Jack and Ruth, two permanent employees. The shop also employs three part-time college students: Travis, Elizabeth, and Marisol.

Define the Problem

If you don't know what the problem is, how can you know you've solved it? Defining the problem allows the group to set boundaries around what the problem is and what it is not, and to begin formalizing a description or definition of the scope, size, or extent of the challenge the group will address. A problem that is too broadly defined can overwhelm the group. If the problem is too narrowly defined, important information will be missed or ignored. The problem that the owner and staff of *Campus Coffee* need to clarify is whether the problem of reduced profits is due to overall customer dissatisfaction or declining coffee sales between 2:00 and 6:00 pm.

Analyze the Problem

Now the group analyzes the problem, trying to gather information and learn more. Grace and Jack review sales reports, and Ruth researches what other coffee shops have done to improve sales. Student employees Travis, Elizabeth, and Marisol share observations that fewer students are on campus after afternoon classes end. They come up with a simple questionnaire and gather feedback from students on campus. At the end of this process, the group determines that, in fact, the declining sales are due to reduced foot traffic in the afternoon.

Establish Criteria

Establishing the criteria for a solution is the next step. At this point, each group member has contributed information from their perspective regarding the strengths and limitations of their resources. The group agrees that any solution must be affordable, manageable for a small staff, and flexible enough to fit changing student-employee schedules.

Consider Possible Solutions to the Problem

The group has listened to each other, and now Grace facilitates a brainstorming group session to address the challenges while focusing resources on those solutions that are more likely to produce results. Jack suggests an afternoon discount, Elizabeth and Ruth propose promoting study space on social media, Marisol recommends adding a limited-time specialty drink, and Travis suggests including a half-off pastry in the discount.



Figure 9.3.2: Grace and the *Campus Coffee* crew are hoping their discount on a specialty coffee and pastry during the afternoon will help boost sales. (CC BY 2.0; Bex Walton via Wikimedia Commons)

Decide on a Solution

The group now needs to select the option that best meets the group's criteria. After discussion, the group agrees to offer a "Study Hour" discount on a coffee drink and a pastry, paired with social media promotion, to attract students during the slower afternoon hours.

Implement the Solution

Now the group must put the chosen decision into action through coordinated group effort. Elizabeth conducts an informal poll of fellow students on campus, asking which of the three specialty drinks would be most likely to bring them to the shop in the afternoon. Once they've determined which drink they will discount, Jack and Ruth update the register system, Travis designs a social media post, Marisol creates signage, and Grace oversees scheduling and communication.

Evaluate the Solution

The group doesn't want to forget to assess the effectiveness of the decision after implementation. Two weeks later, Grace leads a follow-up meeting where the team reviews sales data and agrees that the strategy has increased afternoon traffic and that profits are up. Problem solved!



Figure 9.3.3: Now that the *Campus Coffee* staff has solved their problem of declining sales, they are welcoming in more customers than ever to enjoy their delicious coffee creations. (Public Domain; www.Pixel.la Free Stock Photos via Wikimedia Commons)

This scenario allows us to see that the problem may have many dimensions and may have several solutions, but resources can be limited, and not every solution is successful. Even though the problem is not immediately resolved, the group problem-solving pattern serves as a useful guide through the problem-solving process.

How to Choose the Best Solution

Sometimes groups get stuck on choosing the right solution. Often, like *Campus Coffee*, the best option is determined by a number of variables.

Example 9.3.2 Consider Task Talent and Time

As Grace facilitates her group through this process, she also needs to consider three variables as she decides which solution to choose. The complexity of the task, the knowledge or skill level of her group members, and how quickly the solution needs to be put in place. Or, consider *the variables of task, talent, and time*. For instance, say Grace and her group determine that the best solution is a completely new website that is significantly upgraded in features. But if no one in the group has the skillset to create a new website and Grace can't afford an outside vendor to do it, even if that's the best solution, it's not a workable one. At least at the moment. Or what if someone in the group can upgrade the website? But they are one of the student employees who are leaving for a month-long internship. If Grace can't wait a month or more to increase her revenue, she needs to find another solution for the time being.

When establishing the criteria step, be sure to consider your group's variables of task, talent, and time so that the group doesn't waste time and effort considering unworkable solutions. It's tempting to just rush to brainstorming for solutions. But taking a little extra time in these earlier steps of the problem-solving process can make the difference between a disastrous outcome and a solution that solves the problem effectively.

Try This 9.3.1 Take Your Time

Next time your group needs to solve a problem, slow down. And when you start discussing the criteria your solution needs to fit, remember to ask yourselves:

- **Consider the task**: Is the solution you came up with simple? Moderately difficult? Or extremely complex?
- **Consider the talent**: Does your group have the ability to implement this solution easily, or are your group's skills in this area limited? Or perhaps nonexistent!

- **Consider the time**: Do you have plenty of time to implement your solution? Or barely adequate time? Or does this solution need to be in place yesterday?

Decision-Making

Simply put, **decision-making** is the process of choosing among options and arriving at a position, judgment, or action. It usually answers a "wh-" question—i.e., what, who, where, or when?—or perhaps a "how" question. Our lives are shaped, in large part, by the choices we make each day. And so it is with our group experience.

A group may, of course, make a decision in order to solve a problem. For instance, a group of students might discover halfway through a project that some of its members are failing to contribute to the required work. They might then decide to develop a written timeline and a set of deadlines for the group to hopefully lead them out of their difficulty.

Not every group decision, however, will be in response to a problem. Many decisions relate to routine logistical matters, such as when and where to schedule an event or how to reach someone who wasn't able to make it to a meeting. Thus, decision-making differs from problem-solving.

Any decision-making in a group, even about routine topics, is significant. Why? Decision-making, like problem-solving, results in a change in a group's status, posture, or stature. Such a change, in turn, requires energy and attention on the part of a group in order for the group to progress easily into a new reality. Things will be different in the group once a problem has been solved or a decision has been reached, and group members will need to adjust.

Methods of Reaching Decisions

While research indicates that groups generate more ideas and make more accurate decisions, they also operate more slowly than individuals (Hoy & Miskel, 1982). Under time pressure and other constraints, some group leaders exercise their power to make a decision unilaterally—alone—because they're willing to sacrifice a degree of accuracy for the sake of speed. Sometimes this behavior turns out to be wise; sometimes it doesn't.

Assuming that a group determines that it must reach a decision together on some matter, rather than deferring to the will of a single person, the group can proceed according to several methods, says authors Glenn Parker and Robert Hoffman (Parker & Hoffman, 2006). Peter Hartley and Mark Dawson agree and place decision-making procedures in several categories (Hartley & Dawson, 2010). Here is a synthesis of the conclusions of the two research teams and the different ways a group can go through the decision-making process.

"A Plop"

A plop is a decision reached by a lack of response. Group members sometimes express views and identify alternatives, but then reach no decision and take no action. When people go their own ways after such a "plop," things sometimes take care of themselves, and the lack of a decision causes no difficulties. On the other hand, if a group ignores or postpones a decision that really needs attention, its members may confront tougher decisions later—some of which may deal with problems brought about by not addressing a topic when it was at an early stage.

Delegation to an Expert

A group may not be ready to make a decision at a given time, either because it lacks sufficient information or is experiencing unresolved conflict among members with differing views. In such a situation, the group may not want to simply drop the matter and move on. Instead, it may turn to one of its members whom everyone feels has the expertise to choose wisely among the alternatives that the group is considering. The group can either ask the expert to come back later with a final proposal or simply allow the person to make the decision alone after having gathered whatever further information they feel is necessary.

Averaging

Group members may shift their individual stances regarding a question by "splitting the difference" to reach a "middle ground."

This technique tends to work most easily if numbers are involved. For instance, a group trying to decide how much money to spend on a gift for a departing member might ask everyone for a preferred amount and agree to spend whatever is computed by averaging those amounts.



Figure 9.3.4: This group is too large to have an in-depth discussion and come to a consensus. So they opt to vote, a manageable form of decision-making for larger groups. (CC BY 2.0; Sebastiaan ter Burg via Wikimedia Commons)

Voting

If you need to be quick and definitive in making a decision, voting is probably the best method. The most common is the majority vote, which requires that more than half of a group's members vote for a proposal.

Voting is essentially a win/lose activity. You can probably remember a time when you or someone else in a group composed part of a strong and passionate minority whose desires were thwarted because of the results of a vote. How much commitment did you feel to support the results of that vote?

Voting does offer a quick and simple way to reach decisions, but it works better in some situations than in others. If the members of a group see no other way to overcome a deadlock, for instance, voting may make sense. Likewise, very large groups, such as those pictured above, and those facing serious time constraints, may see advantages to voting. Finally, the efficiency of voting is appealing when it comes to making routine or noncontroversial decisions that need only to be officially approved.

Consensus

In consensus decision-making, group members reach a resolution that all of the members can support as being acceptable as a means of accomplishing some mutual goal, even though it may not be the preferred choice for everyone. In common use, "consensus" can range in meaning from unanimity to a simple majority vote.

Consensus should not be confused with unanimity, which means only that no one has explicitly stated objections to a proposal or decision. Although unanimity can certainly convey an accurate perspective of a group's views at times, groupthink also often leads to unanimous decisions. Therefore, it's probably wise to be cautious when a group of diverse people with little to no discussion seems to have formed a totally unified bloc when faced with controversial alternatives.

When a consensus decision is reached through full interchange of views and is then adopted in good faith by all parties to a discussion, it can energize and motivate a group. Besides avoiding the win/lose elements intrinsic to voting, it converts each member's investment in a decision into a stake in preserving and promoting the decision after it has been agreed upon.

Guidelines for Seeking Consensus

How can a group actually go about working toward consensus?

Try This 9.3.2 Coming to Consensus

- **First:** Be sure everyone knows the definition of consensus and is comfortable with observing it. For many group members, this may mean suspending judgment and trying something they've never done before. Remind people that consensus requires a joint dedication to moving forward toward improvement in and by the group.
- **Second:** Ask each member to participate. Even the quietest person should be actively "polled" from time to time for their perspectives. In fact, it's a good idea to take special pains to ask for varied viewpoints when discussion seems to be stalled or contentious.
- **Third:** Listen honestly and openly to each group member's viewpoints. Attempt to seek and gather information from others. Do your best to subdue your emotions and your tendency to judge and evaluate.
- **Fourth:** Be patient. Reaching a consensus often takes much more time than voting would. A premature "agreement" reached because people give in to speed things up or avoid conflict is likely to weaken or fall apart later.
- **Fifth:** Always look for mutually acceptable ways to make it through challenging circumstances. Don't resort to chance mechanisms like flipping a coin, and don't trade decisions arbitrarily just so that things come out equally for people who remain committed to opposing views.
- **Sixth:** Resolve gridlock earnestly. Stop and ask, "Have we really identified every possible feasible way that our group might act?" If members of a group simply can't agree on one alternative, see if they can all find and accept the next-best option. Then be sure to request an explicit statement from them that they are prepared to commit themselves to that option genuinely.

Although consensus entails full participation and assent within a group, it usually can't be reached without guidance from a leader. Consensus decision-making is easiest within groups whose members know and respect each other, whose authority is more or less evenly distributed, and whose basic values are shared.

Decision-Making by Leaders

People in the business world often need to make decisions in groups composed of their associates and employees. This skill is also needed in settings like the one pictured below, a conference designed to connect young entrepreneurs with potential investors and seasoned professionals. This woman's ability to interact effectively in this group setting could be crucial to her success.



Figure 9.3.5: A young woman entrepreneur benefits from working in a group with experienced professionals. (Public Domain; GES 2016 via Wikimedia Commons)

Many business owners make decisions based on intuition and analysis. They'll feel their gut instinct, analyze appropriate financial facts, or do a little bit of both. Unfortunately, this kind of dualistic decision-making approach restricts an individual leader's options. It doesn't do justice to the complexity of the group environment. It also fails to fully exploit the power and relevance of other people's knowledge.

Too much feeling may produce arbitrary outcomes. And, as the management theorist Peter Drucker observed, too much fact can create stagnation and "analysis paralysis": "(A)n overload of information, that is, anything much beyond what is truly needed, leads to information blackout. It does not enrich, but impoverishes" (Drucker, 1993).

To add to the understanding of groups and how they function is the work of two authors, Robert Tannenbaum and Warren Schmidt. They wrote an article in 1973 designed to help groups assess and strengthen the quality of their decision-making and to choose an effective leadership pattern for their group dynamics. (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973). Their article so appealed to American readers that more than one million reprints were eventually sold. From this material, they developed the "Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum." Let's look at the process so we can better understand how to match a leadership style to a particular group setting.

The Tannnenbaum-Schmidt Continuum

Let's use the **Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum** (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973) to go through the decision-making process. A business owner and their team are trying to decide whether this is the time to expand their locally owned chain of stores. Should they open another store in the neighboring town? Or work on increasing profits at the existing store locations? Sometimes, as in this case, there isn't a clear right-or-wrong decision. This continuum shows us the spectrum of ways the business owner can go about making this decision.

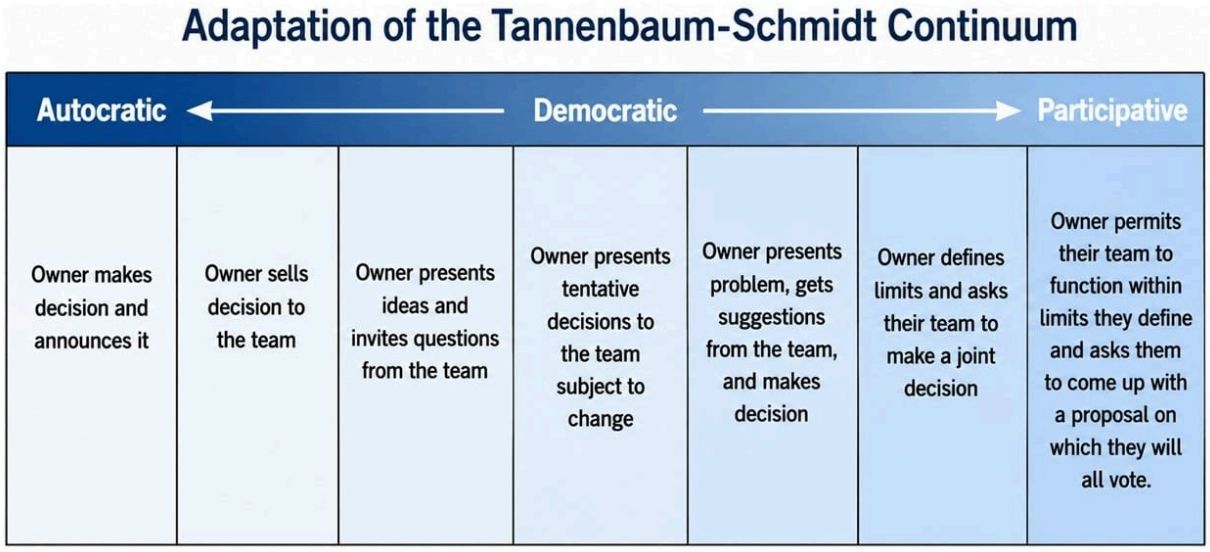


Figure 9.3.6: The style of leadership will heavily influence how a leader goes about making a decision. Alternative description of image. (Public Domain; OpenAI via ChatGPT)

Of course, many decisions embody more complications and include more details than Figure 9.3.6 above. Some are related to people: Shall we bring more people into the group who have the necessary experience or knowledge we do not? If we do, how many should be full-fledged and how many should be temporary or provisional? Or do we need to reduce the number of members who will be involved in this process? Other decisions depend on financial variables and constraints: Can we trust the economy enough to invest in a new store location? How long do we have before we need to make this decision?

The Tannenbaum-Schmidt model doesn't tell us how to choose between its own options. Tannenbaum and Schmidt, however, did offer some advice on this score. These are some topics they suggested that leaders address as they decide where to position themselves on the continuum:

Once you've reached a decision, take a few steps back. Ask yourself, "Is it truly consistent with our group's values, or was it perhaps simply a technocratic outcome: i.e., procedurally proper but devoid of empathy and human understanding? Throughout history, many a group's decision reached "by the book" later caused dissension, disappointment, or even dissolution of the group

itself.

The group needs to consider all aspects of the group and the issues at hand before committing to a particular decision-making method. Is the organization new or relatively solid and secure? Is there enough time to involve as many people as we'd like? These questions and more are important to ask before beginning the decision-making process. Taking the extra time to complete this step will increase the chance that the group will make a decision that is beneficial to the group and its goals.

Key Takeaways

- Group problem-solving involves the following steps: defining, analyzing, establishing criteria, considering solutions, deciding, implementing, and evaluating.
- The reflective thinking sequence offers a seven-step process for problem-solving.
- Understanding various decision-making methods, such as delegation to experts, averaging, voting, and consensus, allows groups to choose the most suitable approach for effective outcomes.
- Consensus decision-making strengthens group commitment and motivation by reaching resolutions acceptable to all members, enhancing group cohesion and investment.
- The Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum presents decision-making styles from autocratic to participative.

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9.4: Conflict Management in Groups

Conflict Is Universal

The word “conflict” produces a sense of anxiety for many people, but it is part of the human experience. Just because conflict is universal does not mean that we cannot improve how we handle disagreements, misunderstandings, and struggles to understand or make ourselves understood. Joyce Hocker and William Wilmot offer us several. **principles on conflict** that have been adapted here for our discussion (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991).

What Is Conflict?

- Conflict is universal.
- Conflict is associated with incompatible goals
- Conflict is associated with scarce resources
- Conflict is associated with interference
- Conflict is not a sign of a poor relationship
- Conflict cannot be avoided
- Conflict cannot always be resolved
- Conflict is not always bad

Conflict is the physical or psychological struggle associated with the perception of opposing or incompatible goals, desires, demands, wants, or needs (McLean, 2005). When incompatible goals, scarce resources, or interference are present, conflict is a typical result, but it doesn’t mean the relationship is poor or failing. Conflict is universal, but how and when it occurs is open to influence and interpretation. Rather than viewing conflict from a negative frame of reference, view it as an opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship.

Conflict Management Strategies

We can acknowledge and anticipate that conflict will be present in every context or environment where communication occurs, particularly in groups. To that end, we can predict, anticipate, and formulate strategies to address conflict successfully. How you choose to approach conflict influences its resolution. Joseph DeVito offers us several **conflict management strategies** that we have adapted and expanded for our use (DeVito, 2003).

Avoidance

You may choose to change the subject, leave the room, or not even enter the room in the first place, but the conflict will remain and resurface when you least expect it. Your reluctance to address the conflict directly is a normal response, and one which many cultures prize. In cultures where independence is highly valued, direct confrontation is more common. In cultures where the community is emphasized over the individual, indirect strategies may be more common. Avoidance allows for more time to resolve the problem, but can also increase costs associated with the problem in the first place. Your organization or business will have policies and protocols for handling conflict and redress. However, it is always wise to consider the position of the group member(s) with whom you are in conflict and give them, as well as yourself, time to explore alternatives.

Defensiveness vs. Supportiveness

Jack Gibb discussed defensive and supportive communication interactions as part of his analysis of conflict management. Defensive communication is characterized by control, evaluation, and judgments, while supportive communication focuses on the points and not personalities (Gibb, 1961). When we feel judged or criticized, our ability to listen can be diminished, and we may only hear the negative message. By choosing to focus on the message instead of the messenger, we keep the group discussion supportive and professional.

Face-Detracting and Face-Saving

Communication is not competition. Communication is the sharing of understanding and meaning, but does everyone always share equally? People struggle for control within a group, limit access to resources and information as part of territorial displays, and otherwise use the process of communication to engage in competition. People also use communication for collaboration, which is one of the strengths of working in groups. Both competition and collaboration can be observed in group communication interactions, but there are two concepts central to both: face-detracting and face-saving strategies.

Face-detracting strategies involve messages or statements that take away from the respect, integrity, or credibility of a person. **Face-saving strategies** protect credibility and separate the message from the messenger. For example, you might say in the weekly staff meeting that "sales were down this quarter," without specifically noting who was responsible. Sales were simply down. If, however, you ask, "How does the sales manager explain the decline in sales?" you have specifically connected an individual with the negative news. While we may want to specifically connect tasks and job responsibilities to individuals and departments, in terms of language, each strategy has distinct results.

Face-detracting strategies often produce a defensive communication climate, inhibit listening, and allow for little room for collaboration. To save face is to raise the issue while preserving a supportive climate in the group, allowing room in the discussion for constructive discussions and problem-solving. By using a face-saving strategy to shift the emphasis from the individual to the issue, we avoid power struggles and personal attacks. This strategy provides each other space to save face and enhances future group dynamics. (Donohue & Klot, 1992).

In collectivist cultures, where the community's well-being is promoted or valued above that of the individual, face-saving strategies are common communicative strategies. Groups are valued, and the role of the individual is de-emphasized. In Japan, for example, to confront someone directly is perceived as humiliation, a great insult. In the United States, greater emphasis is placed on individual performance, and responsibility may be more directly assessed. If our goal is to solve a problem within the group and preserve the relationship amongst members, then consideration of a face-saving strategy should be one option a skilled communicator considers when addressing negative news or information.

Conflict Styles

If you're a member of a group, you most likely want to minimize futile conflict—conflict that is unlikely to be resolved no matter what you do to address it. In fact, in a larger group like the one below, there might be more conflict. You also probably prefer to avoid conflicts that might weaken your group, or those whose nature or outcome is irrelevant to your goals. Once you and the other members of a group recognize that you are involved in a significant conflict whose resolution may make it more likely that you can achieve your goals, you may engage in the conflict via several styles. In this section, we'll consider "menus" of styles proposed by three groups of communication authorities.



Figure 9.4.1: Productive conflict, where all voices are heard, will provide this group with a more effective result. (CC BY-SA 4.0 International; Pinakpani via Wikimedia Commons)

Three Style "Menus"

All three style "menus" include a range of approaches, as represented in Table 9.4.1. The styles described by Linda Putnam and Charmaine Wilson range from nonconfrontational to controlling and cooperative (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). According to Putnam and Wilson, if you adopt a **nonconfrontational conflict style**, you refrain from expressing your thoughts and opinions during a conflict. This may be because you're shy or feel intimidated by the group environment or the behavior of some of its members. It may also be because you don't know how to express viewpoints constructively under the time constraints of a conflict situation, or lack information about the topic of the conflict. If you adopt a **controlling conflict style**, by contrast, you'll try to monopolize discussion during a conflict and make a serious effort to force others in the group to either agree with you or at least accept your proposals for how the group should act. The **cooperative conflict style,** finally, involves active participation in the group's conflicts in a spirit of give-and-take, with the group's superordinate goals in mind.

Authors Rahim, Antonioni, and Psenicka enlarged upon Putnam and Wilson's three-style "menu" by adding two further options (Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001). They framed their conceptualization in terms of potential combinations of two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others.

Who Do You Care About?

- **Integrating style:** They have a high concern for self and others. Openness; willingness to exchange information and resolve conflict in a manner acceptable to all parties.
- **Obliging style:** They have a low concern for self and high concern for others. A tendency to minimize points of difference among parties to a conflict and to try to satisfy other people's needs.
- **Dominating style:** They have a high concern for self and low concern for others. A win-lose orientation and a drive to compel others to accept one's position.
- **Avoiding style:** They have a low concern for self and low concern for others. Sidestepping areas of conflict, passing the buck to others, or withdrawing entirely from the conflict situation.
- **Compromising style:** They have an intermediate concern for self and for others. Mutual sacrifice for the sake of achieving an outcome that all members of the group can accept.

Let's look at how these combinations affect a group member's conflict management style.

Table 9.4.1 Individual Styles of Conflict in Groups

Table 9.4.1: Individual Styles of Conflict in Groups

Putnam & Wilson	Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka	Adler & Rodman
Nonconfrontational	Integrating	Nonassertive
	Obliging	Directly Aggressive
Controlling	Dominating	Passive Aggressive
	Avoiding	Indirectly Communicating
Cooperative	Compromising	Assertive

Table 9.4.1 Adler, R. B., & Rodman, G. (2009). Understanding human communication (10th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

What Is Your Conflict Style?

Ronald Adler and George Rodman list five conflict styles

(Adler & Rodman, 2009).

- First of all, they designated **nonassertion** as a style of conflict in which the group member is unable or unwilling to express themselves. According to these theorists, this conflict style is widely used in intimate relationships such as marriages, in which the partners may disagree with each other frequently yet decide not to provoke or prolong conflicts by voicing their differences. People in groups can display a nonassertive style by either ignoring areas of conflict, trying to change the subject when a conflict appears to be arising, physically removing themselves from a place where a conflict is taking place, or simply giving in to someone else's desires during a conflict.
- The second conflict style is **direct aggression**. (Adler & Rodman, 2009). A group member who attacks someone else willfully—by saying "That's ridiculous" or "That's a crazy idea" or something else that attempts to demean the person—is engaging in direct aggression. Direct aggression need not be verbal; gestures, facial expressions, and posture can all be used to convey aggressive meaning.
- The third conflict style is **passive aggression**, referred to as "crazymaking" by George Bach and Harold Goldberg is a subtle conflict style in which a person expresses hostility or resistance to others through stubbornness, resentment, procrastination, jokes with ambiguous meanings, petty annoyances, or persistent failure to fully meet expectations or responsibilities. Someone who displays this style of conflict in a group may disavow any negative intent if confronted or questioned about their behavior (Bach & Goldberg, 1974).
- Fourth is **indirect communication**, a style that avoids the unmistakable force of the aggressive style and which instead implies concern for the person(s). Kenneth Kellermann and Barbara Shea offer the following examples of this type of behavior. Rather than bluntly saying, "I'd like you to get out of my office now" when a group discussion is bogging down, instead you might yawn discreetly or comment on how much work you have to do on a big project. Indirect communication may comprise hints, suggestions, or other polite means of seeking someone else's compliance with one's desires. Sometimes it can be used to send "trial balloons" to group members—proposals that are tentative and provisional and don't have a great deal of ego investment behind them (Kellermann & Shea, 1996).
- The fifth style is **assertion** and is also the style that experts recommend in most cases. Group members who operate according to this style express their feelings and thoughts clearly but neither coerce nor judge others while doing so. This approach is what Ronald Adler and Neil Towne called an assertive five step process in addressing conflict or a "clear message format" (Adler & Towne, 2002).

Steps to Follow in a Conflict Situation

- **The first step:** Offer an objective description of the behavior being exhibited by those with whom you are in conflict. Don't interpret or assess the behavior; just describe it. For example, you might say, "Lee, you just rolled your eyes at me."
- **The second step:** Present your interpretation of the behavior, but without stating the interpretation as fact. For instance, "Lee, I get the impression that you may have dismissed my proposal, because you rolled your eyes at me."
- **The third step:** Express your feelings about the behavior you've described and interpreted. For example, "When you roll your eyes like that, I get the impression that you've dismissed my proposal, and I feel resentful."
- **The fourth step:** Identify the consequences of the behavior, your interpretation, and your feelings. For instance, "Lee, I see that you rolled your eyes at me when I made my proposal. I get the impression that you've dismissed it, and I'm resentful. I

don't feel like discussing the matter any further now."
- **The final step:** State your intentions, based on the four preceding ingredients of the situation. For example, "Lee, you rolled your eyes at me when I made my proposal. I get the impression that you've dismissed it, and I'm resentful. I don't feel like discussing the matter any further now, and if I see you act this way again I'll probably just leave the room until I calm down."

We admit that following this list of communication behaviors can feel unfamiliar and perhaps overly complex. Fortunately, being responsibly assertive can sometimes be a very simple matter which immediately yields positive results. In fact, following just one or two steps from the five outlined here may be sufficient to prevent, defuse, or resolve unproductive group conflict .

Effective Conflict Management Strategies

> "In calm water, every ship has a good captain."
>
> —Swedish proverb

If group members communicate effectively and show sensitivity to each other's needs and styles, they can often prevent unproductive and destructive conflict from developing. Nevertheless, they should also be prepared to respond in situations when conflict does crop up.

Before considering some strategies for dealing with conflicts, it's worth pointing out that the title of this section refers to "management" of conflict rather than "resolution." The reason for this choice of terminology is that not all conflict needs to be—or can be—resolved. Still, most conflict needs to be managed to keep it from side-tracking, slowing down, weakening, or eventually destroying a group.

Logistical Measures

With respect to proxemics, for instance, research has demonstrated that conflict between people who disagree with each other is more likely to flare up if they sit directly across from each other than if they are seated side by side (Gordon, Mondy, Sharplin, & Premeaux, 1990). Why not, then, purposefully plan where people are going to sit and the angles from which they'll see each other?

Decisions about when and for how long groups gather can also affect their level of conflict. Research on circadian rhythms—the approximately 24-hour cycle that influences alertness and energy—suggests that many people experience their lowest alertness during the early morning hours and a smaller decline in the mid-afternoon (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH], 2020). Depending on whether group members clash more or less when their energy level is low, should be considered before scheduling a meeting at three o'clock in the afternoon.



Figure 9.4.2: Taking a break together helps with team building and can lead to stronger group cohesion. (CC BY 4.0 International; Exec8 via Wikimedia Commons)

And give the group adequate breaks. Taking a break from group work isn't a waste of time. Group members come back to the meeting refreshed mentally and physically. Plus breaktime for a group as pictured above is a good setting for informal team building.

Once Conflict Occurs...

Numerous authorities have offered suggestions on how to manage conflict once it reaches a level where it should not or cannot be allowed to dissipate on its own. Peter Hartley and Mark Dawson suggest taking the following steps (Hartley & Dawson, 2010).

- Make sure the lines of communication are open. If they aren't, open them.
- Define the issues. Don't allow a nebulous sense of overpowering disagreement to develop. Be specific about what the conflict pertains to.
- Focus on the task, rather than on personalities. Discourage or deflect comments that question a group member's motives or personal qualities.
- Proceed according to your established ground rules, policies, procedures, and norms. After all, you established these components of your group's identity precisely to deal with difficult circumstances.

In addition to following rules and procedures peculiar to its own history, a group that's experiencing conflict should strive to maintain civility and follow basic etiquette (Meyer, 2004).

Malcolm Gladwell's popular book, *The Tipping Point*, describes how New York City's subway system was revitalized by David Gunn and William Bratton in the 1980s and 90s (Gladwell, 2000). Together, Gunn and Bratton launched a campaign to eliminate vandalism, including graffiti on the sides of train cars, and to prosecute "fare-beaters." At the start of the campaign, doubters complained that more serious crime in the subways and streets needed to be attacked first. Gunn and Bratton insisted, however, that setting a broad example of civility would ultimately create an atmosphere in which potential criminals would be less likely to engage in serious criminal acts. After many years of relentlessly enforcing basic laws mandating public decency, not only did graffiti nearly disappear entirely from the subway system, but overall crime in the New York metropolitan area declined substantially.

Hopefully, you will never witness vandalism, much less felonious behavior, in a small group. Malicious verbal interchanges, nevertheless, can poison the atmosphere among people and should be prevented if at all possible. As an old Japanese saying puts it, "The one who raises his voice first loses the argument." It doesn't hurt to calmly and quietly ask that discussion of particularly contentious topics be postponed if comments seem to be in danger of overwhelming the group with negativity.

In addition to reminding people that they should exercise basic politeness, it may be wise at times for someone in the group to ask for a recess in a discussion. Calvin Coolidge said, "I have never been hurt by anything I didn't say," and it may be a good idea in irate moments to silence people briefly to prevent what Adler and Rodman referred to as an "escalatory spiral" of hurtful conversation (Adler & Rodman, 2009).

If the tone of a group discussion permits thoughtful reflection, it can be helpful to separate task and relationship goals and deal with conflict over each kind of goal separately (Fisher & Brown, 1988). Using indirect communication, rather than confronting another group member head-on, may also defuse extreme emotions and preserve other people's faces.

Try This 9.4.1 More Tips for Managing Conflict

Here are further techniques for managing conflict in group interactions:

- "Test the waters" for new ideas without making it seem that you're so attached to them that you'll fight to impose them on others.
- If an ego clash erupts, see if you can identify something that the disagreeing individuals *can* agree on. Perhaps this will be a superordinate goal. It could also be a common opposing force, since the idea that "my enemy's enemy is my friend" can serve to bind people together.
- Employ active listening. Strive to fully understand other people's viewpoints before stating your own.
- If people's comments meander to topics that aren't germane, steer the discussion back to the key issues under discussion.
- Frame the situation as a problem to be solved, rather than as a struggle which must be won.

- Treat everyone as partners on a common quest. Invite continued frank interchanges and assure group members that they may speak out without fear of reprisal.
- Consider carefully how important it is for you to prevail in a particular conflict or even just to express your views. Ask yourself whether the potential negative consequences of your action will be worth it.
- Unless a disagreement is over an essential point, consider whether it might be best to “agree to disagree” and move on.

Going with the Flow

As we’ve seen, there is no shortage of specific strategies and techniques for people to choose when conflict occurs in a group. In fact, it may be overwhelming to try to decide which strategies and techniques to use, at which times and with which people, under which circumstances. Randy Fujishin, a therapist and writer from California, proposed an attitude that might help people deal both with conflict itself and with the feelings of stress it often engenders. He suggests that we regard conflict as neither a call to battle nor a warning to dissolve or disband a group. Instead, Fujishin proposes that people regard conflict as “an invitation to listen, learn, explore, and grow." His advice when conflict takes place is this: “Instead of tensing, relax. Instead of stiffening, bend. Instead of arguing, listen. Instead of pushing or running away, get closer. Flow with the disagreement, situation, or individual for a period to discover where it may lead” (Fujishin, 1998). The group member pictured below is following that advice.



Figure 9.4.3: Often the best action a group member can take to avoid unproductive conflict is to listen. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Filipinayzd via Wikimedia Commons)

Perhaps the central message we can derive from Fujishin’s writings on this topic is that, although we should respond to group conflict earnestly, we should take a long view and avoid losing our composure in the process of managing it. Even at moments of extreme tension, we can remind ourselves of an ancient saying attributed first to Persian mystics and later cited by such notable figures as Abraham Lincoln: “This too shall pass" (Taylor, 1968).

Key Takeaways

- Conflict is universal and managed through styles like avoidance, defensiveness, and face-saving strategies.
- Effective communication is vital for resolving conflicts and fostering a supportive, professional environment.
- Conflict styles vary from nonconfrontational to assertive, influencing communication dynamics and outcomes.
- Face-saving strategies protect credibility, while face-detracting strategies can lead to defensive climates.
- Conflict management involves open communication, issue definition, task focus, and maintaining civility in groups.

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9.5: Intercultural Communication in Groups

What Is Intercultural Communication?

Communication is the sharing of understanding and meaning (Pearson & Nelson, 2000). But what is intercultural communication? If you answered, “the sharing of understanding and meaning across cultures,” you’d be close, but the definition requires more attention. What is a culture? Where does one culture stop and another start? How are cultures created, maintained, and dissolved (Klopf, 1991)? Klopf describes culture as “that part of the environment made by humans.” From the building we erect that represents design values to the fences we install that delineate borders, our environment is a representation of culture, but it is not all that is culture.

> "Understand the differences; act on the commonalities"
>
> (Masondo, as cited in Hauss, 2003).

Culture involves beliefs, attitudes, values, and traditions that are shared by a group of people. We often consider elements of our environment: the clothes we wear, the movies we watch, or the video games we play, all representations of culture. Culture also involves the psychological aspects of our expectations of the communication context. From the choice of words (message), to how we communicate (in person, or by email), to how we acknowledge understanding with a nod or a glance (nonverbal feedback), to the internal and external interference, all aspects of communication are influenced by culture.

In defining **intercultural communication**, we only have eight components of communication to work with, and yet we must bridge divergent cultures with distinct values across languages and time zones to exchange value, a representation of meaning. It may be tempting to consider only the source and receiver within a transaction as a representation of intercultural communication, but if we do that, we miss the other six components—the message, channel, feedback, context, environment, and interference—in every communicative act. Each component influences and is influenced by culture. Is culture context? Environment? Message? Culture is represented in all eight components every time we communicate. All communication is intercultural.

Everett Rogers and Thomas Steinfatt define intercultural communication as the exchange of information between individuals who are “unalike culturally" (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). If you follow our discussion and its implications, you may arrive at the idea that ultimately we are each a “culture of one”—we are simultaneously a part of community and its culture(s), and separate from it in the unique combination that represents us as an individual. All of us are separated by a matter of degrees from each other, even if we were raised on the same street, by parents of similar educational background and profession, and have many other things in common. Since a group is composed of individuals, this exchange of information becomes more complex.



Figure 9.5.1: At a conference, advocate for human rights Zainab M. Hassan demonstrates the importance of listening in order to bridge the gaps of understanding that communication between cultures can create. (CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain; AMISOM Public Information via Wikimedia Commons)

And in this chapter, we are discussing group communication. So, how much more important is it to explore intercultural communication within the framework of the group? For instance, within the same family, can there be intercultural communication? If all communication is intercultural, then the answer would be yes, but we still have to prove our case. Imagine a three-generation family living in one house. The grandparents may represent another time and different values from the grandchildren. The parents may have a different level of education and pursue different careers from the grandparents; the schooling the children are receiving may prepare them for yet another career. From music to food preferences to how work is done may vary across time; a favorite movie star of the parents may seem like ancient history to the children. The communication across generations represents intercultural communication, even if only to a limited degree. We are each shaped by our upbringing, and it influences our worldview, what we value, and how we interact with each other. We create culture, and it creates us. And these variables all influence group dynamics.

Culture is part of the very fabric of our thought, and we cannot separate ourselves from it, even as we leave home, defining ourselves anew in work and achievement. And that includes the groups in our lives. Every business or organization has a culture, and within what may be considered a global culture, there are many subcultures or co-cultures. For example, consider the difference between the sales and accounting departments in a corporation: we can quickly see two distinct groups, with their own symbols, vocabulary, and values. Within each group, there may also be smaller groups, and each member of each department comes from a distinct background that, in itself, influences behavior and interaction.



Figure 9.5.2: This group illustrates the multi-faceted nature of intercultural communication. These members come from different ethnic cultures, which may require extra effort to ensure clear communication. Yet they are also part of the same professional culture. That similarity can help them achieve success as a group. (Public Domain; GES 2016 via Wikimedia Commons)

Intercultural communication is a fascinating area of study within group or organizational communication, and is essential to your success. One idea to keep in mind as we examine this topic is the importance of considering multiple points of view. If you tend to dismiss ideas or views that are "unalike culturally," you will find it challenging to learn about diverse cultures. But if you cannot learn, how can you grow and be successful?

Having pride in your culture can be healthy, but history has taught us that **ethnocentrism**, or having a predisposition to discount other cultures simply because they are different, can be hurtful, damaging, and dangerous. Ethnocentrism makes us far less likely to be able to bridge the gap with others and often increases intolerance of difference. Business and industry are no longer regional, and in your career and personal life, you will likely cross borders, languages, and cultures. You will also find yourselves in groups in those areas of your life as well. You will need tolerance, understanding, patience, and openness to difference. An effective communicator knows that the process of learning is never complete, and being open to new ideas is a key strategy to contributing to the success of your group.



Figure 9.5.3: What we wear often reflects our culture. This group is attending a professional conference in Nigeria. Their culture dictates that the colorful traditional dress many attendees are wearing is appropriate in this setting. However, that would not be the case in some cultures, where a different unwritten dress code is in place. (CC0 1.0 Universal; Ngostary2k via Wikimedia Commons)

Cultures reflect diversity with a range of values, symbols, and meanings across communities. Can you tie a knot? Perhaps you can tie your shoes, but what about a knot to secure a line to a boat, or to secure a heavy load on a cart or truck? To bundle a bale of hay? You may not be able to, but if you were raised in a culture that places a high value on knot-tying for specific purposes, you would learn what your community values. We all have viewpoints, but they are shaped by our interactions with our communities. As we interact within our groups, we need to keep this insight in mind.

How Cultural Perspectives Differ

To become more effective with intercultural communication in groups, we need to examine several points of divergence across cultures.

Individualistic vs. Collectivist Cultures

People in **individualistic cultures** value individual freedom and personal independence, and cultures always have stories to reflect their values. In some movies or books, one person overcomes all obstacles. Through personal ingenuity, in spite of challenges, one person rises successfully to conquer or vanquish those obstacles. Sometimes they get some help, but still the story repeats itself again and again, reflecting the cultural viewpoint.

In a number of published works, the Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede explored the concepts of individualism and collectivism across diverse cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001). He found that in individualistic cultures, like the United States, people perceived their world primarily from their own viewpoint. They perceived themselves as empowered individuals, capable of making their own decisions and able to make an impact on their own lives (Hofstede, 2005).

Cultural viewpoint is not an either/or dichotomy, but rather a continuum or range. You may belong to some communities that express individualistic cultural values, while others place the focus on a collective viewpoint. **Collectivist cultures,** including many in Asia and South America, focus on the needs of the nation, community, family, or group of workers (Hofstede, 1980). Ownership and private property are one way to examine this difference. In some cultures, property is almost exclusively private, while others tend toward community ownership. The collectively owned resource returns benefits to the community. Water, for example, has long been viewed as a community resource, much like air, but that has been changing as businesses and organizations have purchased water rights and gained control over resources. Public lands, such as parks, are often considered public, and individual exploitation of them is restricted. While public/private initiatives exist, the cultural viewpoint is our topic. How does someone raised in a culture that emphasizes the community interact with someone raised in a primarily individualistic culture? How could tensions be expressed, and how might interactions be influenced by this point of divergence?

Example 9.5.1 When Clear Communication Is Crucial

In a multinational marketing team at a tech company working on the "Global Expansion Project," Sarah and Hiroki have been asked to co-lead a task force to increase market share. Sarah, an American team member, emphasizes innovative strategies and individual contributions to drive market growth, typical of someone from an individualistic culture. On the other hand, Hiroki, a team member from Japan, a collectivist culture, values consensus-building and group decision-making to ensure harmony and collective success. Their differing cultural viewpoints can lead to challenging group dynamics, with Sarah and Hiroki working at odds with one another without even realizing it.

For instance, when deciding on an approach for a new market, Sarah may push for rapid implementation of her innovative ideas, while Hiroki seeks consensus among team members. This conflicting approach could lead to delays in decision-making, a lack of alignment on strategies, and decreased productivity as the team struggles to find a balance between individual creativity and collective decision-making.

To address the communication challenge between them, Sarah and Hiroki decide to implement a structured decision-making process that combines Sarah's innovative ideas with Hiroki's consensus-building approach. Establishing clear communication channels and regular team meetings to discuss and align on strategies can help bridge the cultural gap. Sarah and Hiroki's willingness to engage in open dialogue, mutual respect, and understanding of each other's perspectives resulted in collaboration and synergy with each other and the team. Their efforts lead to more effective decision-making and improved project outcomes. As a result, the task force succeeds in its goals.

However, this isn't the only cultural difference that can negatively impact group communication.

Explicit Rule Cultures vs. Implicit Rule Cultures

Do you know the rules of your business or organization? Did you learn them from an employee manual or by observing the conduct of others? Your response may include both options, but not all cultures communicate rules in the same way (Dodd, 1998). Dodd discusses this difference and has found quite a range of differences. In an **explicit rule culture**, where rules are clearly communicated so that everyone is aware of them, the guidelines and agenda for a meeting are announced prior to the gathering. In an **implicit rule culture**, where rules are often understood and communicated nonverbally, there may be no agenda. Everyone knows why they are gathered, what role each member plays, and the expectation may not be clearly stated. Power, status, and behavioral expectations may all be understood, but to the person from outside this culture, understanding the rules of the context may prove challenging.

Outsiders often communicate their "otherness" by not knowing where to stand, when to sit, or how to initiate a conversation when the rules are not clearly stated. While it may help to know that implicit rule cultures are often more tolerant of deviation from the understood rules, the newcomer will be wise to learn by observing quietly—and to do as much research ahead of the event as possible.

Time Orientation

Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall state that **monochronic time-oriented cultures** consider one thing at a time, whereas **polychronic time-oriented cultures** schedule many things at one time, and time is considered in a more fluid sense (Hall & Hall, 1987). In monochronic time, interruptions are to be avoided, and everything has its own specific time. Even the multitasker from a monochronic culture will, for example, recognize the value of work first before play or personal time. The United States, Germany, and Switzerland are often noted as countries that value a monochronic time orientation.



Figure 9.5.4: If a fellow conference attendee from the United States joins this group of German professionals, they will experience many cultural differences in their communication. But they will likely have the same orientation to time since both Germany and the United States are primarily monochronic cultures. (CC BY-SA 4.0 International; Jason Kruger for Wikimedia Deutschland e.V. via Wikimedia Commons)

Polychronic time looks a little more complicated, with business occasions mixed with social elements such as family members present or activities such as a leisurely dinner and dancing included. Greece, Italy, Chile, and Saudi Arabia are countries where one can observe this perception of time; while business meetings may be scheduled at a fixed time, when they actually begin is another story. Also note that the dinner invitation for 8 p.m. may, in reality, be more like 9 p.m., and if you were to show up on time, you might be the first person to arrive and find that the hosts are not quite ready to receive you.

When in doubt, always ask before the event; many people from polychronic cultures will be used to foreigners' tendency to be punctual, even compulsive, about respecting established times for events. The mindful communicator is aware of this difference and takes steps to anticipate it. The value of time in different cultures is expressed in many ways, and your understanding can help you communicate more effectively.

Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation

Do you want your reward right now, or can you dedicate yourself to a long-term goal? You may work in a culture that values immediate results, and grow impatient when those results do not materialize. Geert Hofstede discusses this relationship of time orientation to a culture as a "time horizon," and it underscores the perspective of the individual within a cultural context (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, 2005). Many countries in Asia, influenced by the teachings of Confucius, value a long-term orientation, whereas other countries, including the United States, have a more short-term approach to life and results. Indigenous American cultures are known for holding a long-term orientation, as illustrated by the proverb attributed to the Iroquois that decisions require contemplation of their impact seven generations removed.

If you work within a culture that has a **short-term orientation**, you may need to place greater emphasis on reciprocation of greetings, gifts, and rewards. For example, if you send a thank-you note the morning after being treated to a business dinner, your host will appreciate your promptness. While there may be respect for tradition, there is also an emphasis on personal representation and honor, a reflection of identity and integrity. Personal stability and consistency are also valued in a short-term-oriented culture, contributing to an overall sense of predictability and familiarity.

Long-term orientation is often marked by persistence, thrift, and frugality, and an order to relationships based on age and status. A sense of shame, both personal and for the family and community, is also observed across generations. What an individual does reflects on the family and is carried by immediate and extended family members.

And these differing perspectives can affect group communication as well. For instance, if a group member from a culture that values immediate results is collaborating with a team member from a culture emphasizing long-term goals, there is room for miscommunication in the group. The team member with a short-term orientation may push for quick decisions and actions, expecting immediate outcomes. On the other hand, the team member with a long-term orientation may advocate for thorough planning and consideration of future implications before making decisions.

This can lead to misunderstanding and reduce group cohesion and productivity. The short-term-oriented team member grows impatient with the long-term-oriented team member's deliberative approach, perceiving it as slow or inefficient. Conversely, the long-term-oriented team member may view the short-term-oriented team member as hasty or lacking foresight. These differing time orientations can lead to misunderstandings, frustration, and challenges in finding a common ground for effective collaboration and decision-making within the group.

Direct vs. Indirect

In the United States, which is a **direct culture**, business correspondence is expected to be short and to the point. "What can I do for you?" is a common question when a business person receives a call from a stranger; it is an accepted way of asking the caller to state their business. In some cultures, it is quite appropriate to make a direct personal observation, such as "you've changed your hairstyle," while in others it may be observed, but never spoken of in polite company. In **indirect cultures**, such as those in Latin America, business conversations may start with discussions of the weather, or family, or topics other than business as the partners gain a sense of each other, long before the topic of business is raised. Again, before the first meeting of your intercultural group, you should research the new environment before entering it, as a social faux pas or error can have a significant impact.

Example 9.5.2 When Direct and Indirect Communication Clash

Paul, Maria, and Mei need to give a group presentation in their communication class. The assignment is worth 30% of their grade. So everyone is invested in putting effort into giving a strong presentation. But since the members have different approaches to communicating in a group, there are some challenges to overcome. Paul is from the United States, Maria is from Mexico, and Mei is from China. Since the United States values direct communication, Paul suggests a direct approach to presenting project ideas, while Maria and Mei prefer to start with personal conversations, as they are from cultures that emphasize indirect communication. This cultural difference leads to miscommunication and decision-making delays.

Different Approaches Cause Miscommunication

On top of their initial interactions, the team faces challenges as they use different communication approaches to prepare for their presentation. Paul uses a direct communication style with clear and concise language when presenting project ideas with bullet points and straightforward language to outline key points without much explanation. In group discussions,

Paul is assertive in expressing his opinions and making decisions without seeking extensive input from others. On the other hand, Maria and Mei's indirect communication style causes them to initially put effort into building relationships before discussing project details. For instance, they engage in small talk, ask about each other's well-being, and share personal anecdotes before getting into the main agenda. In decision-making, Maria and Mei value consensus over pushing for their ideas.

Group Dynamics Suffer

Though each member is following what they believe to be effective communication with their fellow group members, miscommunication and tension mount during group discussions. Paul misunderstands Maria and Mei's indirect communication style when they engage in lengthy personal conversations before discussing project details as a waste of time and an unwillingness to focus on the task at hand. He feels impatient and frustrated, not understanding that Maria and Mei are trying to establish rapport and build trust before diving into work-related discussions. Maria and Mei misunderstand Paul's direct communication style as abrupt or insensitive when he quickly moves through project details, without allowing space for personal interactions or seeking input from the team. Maria and Mei perceive him as dismissive or overly task-oriented. They feel that Paul is not valuing their perspectives or taking their cultural communication norms into account.

A Solution is Found

Fortunately for the group, they don't give up. They go to the instructor's office hour to get advice. After listening to all sides, the instructor helps them see the miscommunication that each of their culturally based approaches to the process caused. She encourages them to be more open to different ways of approaching the assignment. She also suggests incorporating a mix of direct and indirect communication styles into their project presentation to accommodate different cultural norms. The team puts in the time and effort into understanding one another and is more flexible in their expectations. As a result, the team finds a balanced approach that respects individual preferences while ensuring effective communication and collaboration. And they get an A on their group presentation!

Materialism vs. Relationships

Does the car someone drives say something about them? You may consider that many people across the planet do not own a vehicle and that a car or truck in and of itself is a statement of wealth, but beyond that, does the make and model reflect their personality? If you are from a materialistic culture, you may be inclined to say yes. If you are from a culture that values relationships rather than material objects, you may say no or focus on how the vehicle serves the family. From rocks that display beauty and wealth—what we call jewelry—to what you eat—will it be lobster ravioli or prime rib?

Members of a materialistic culture place emphasis on external goods and services as a representation of self, of power, and social rank. If you consider the plate of food before you and consider the labor required to harvest the grain, butcher the animal, and cook the meal, you are focusing more on the relationships involved with its production rather than the foods themselves. Cultures differ in how they view material objects and their relationship to them, and some value people and relationships more than the objects themselves. The United States and Japan are often noted as materialistic cultures, while many Scandinavian nations feature cultures that place more emphasis on relationships. Whether a group member values material goods vs. relationships will affect group dynamics.

Low vs. High Power Distance

How comfortable are you with critiquing your boss's decisions? If you are from a low-power-distance culture, your answer might be "no problem." In **low power distance cultures**, according to Hofstede people relate to one another more as equals and less as a reflection of dominant/subordinate roles, regardless of their actual formal roles as employee and manager (Hofstede, 2001).

However, in a **high power distance culture**, you would probably be much less likely to challenge the decision, to provide an alternative, or to give input. If you are working with someone from a high power distance culture, you may need to take extra care to elicit feedback and involve them in the discussion because their cultural framework may preclude their participation. They may have learned that less powerful people must accept decisions without comment, even if they have a concern or know there is a significant problem. Unless you are sensitive to cultural orientation and power distance in your group, you may lose valuable information.

Understanding Intercultural Communication

A major obstacle to effective intercultural communication is stereotyping. Stereotypes can be defined as a generalization about a group of people that oversimplifies their culture (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). Hall suggests that if we put emphasis on a culture as a whole, and how it operates, that may lead us to neglect individual differences (Hall, 1966). Individuals may hold beliefs or practice customs that do not follow their own cultural norms. When we lose these unique differences, we can resort to the mental shortcut of a stereotype. Many perspectives amongst group members can damage group dynamics. Certainly, the presence of stereotyping is one of them.

The American psychologist Gordon Allport explored how, when, and why we formulate or use stereotypes to characterize distinct groups. His results may not surprise you. When we do not have enough contact with people or their cultures to understand them well, we tend to resort to stereotypes (Allport, 1958).



Figure 9.5.5: The focus of this conference, "challenges in building multilingual platforms," reflects how, as the world gets smaller, more effort is being dedicated to how we can clearly communicate between cultures. (CC0 1.0 Universal; Wikimedia Community User Group Malaysia via Wikimedia Commons)

For additional strategies to improve communication between cultures, let's look again at the work of the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall, often cited as a pioneer in the field of intercultural communication (Chen & Starosta, 1998). Born in 1914, Hall spent much of his early adulthood in the multicultural setting of the American Southwest, where Native Americans, Spanish-speakers, and descendants of pioneers came together from diverse cultural perspectives. He then traveled the globe during World War II and later served as a State Department official. Where culture had once been viewed by anthropologists as a single, distinct way of living, Hall saw how the perspective of the individual influences interaction. By focusing on interactions, rather than cultures as separate from individuals, he asked us to evaluate the many cultures we ourselves belong to or are influenced by, as well as those with whom we interact.

While his view makes the study of intercultural communication far more complex, it also brings a healthy dose of reality to the discussion. Hall is generally credited with eight contributions to our study of intercultural communication, such as comparing cultures and shifting your perspective (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; McLean, 2005).

A New Approach to Intercultural Communication

- **Comparing cultures:** Focus on interactions rather than general observations of culture.
- **A shift to local perspective:** Local level versus global perspective.
- **You don't have to know everything to know something:** Time, space, gestures, and gender roles can be studied, even if we lack a larger understanding of the entire culture.
- **There are rules we can learn:** People create rules for themselves in each community that we can learn from, compare, and contrast.

- **Experience counts:** Personal experience has value in addition to more comprehensive studies of interaction and culture.
- **Differences in perspective:** Descriptive linguistics serves as a model to understand cultures, and the US Foreign Service adopted it as a base for training.
- **Application to International Business:** Foreign Service trainings yielded applications to trade and commerce, and became a point of study for business majors.
- **Integration of the disciplines:** Culture and communication are intertwined, and bring together many academic disciplines.

Whether it be in the workplace, in the classroom, your social circles, or family life, when you are in a group and are interacting with someone from another culture, what can you do to ensure clear communication? This section has been about two ways you can become a better intercultural communicator in a group: knowledge and application. This is the last section in this chapter for a reason. Intercultural communication between individuals is hard. In a group, achieving clear communication between cultures is even harder. Take all you've learned in this chapter, and especially in this section, to make the multicultural groups in your life healthy and productive.

Key Takeaways

- Intercultural communication involves exchanging information across diverse cultures, influencing all components of communication.
- Understanding multiple cultural perspectives is crucial for effective communication and bridging cultural differences.
- Cultural differences manifest in various ways, such as individualistic versus collectivist cultures and time orientation.
- Strategies for improving intercultural communication include focusing on interactions, learning from personal experiences, and integrating cultural understanding into disciplines.

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9.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

This chapter has covered many of the facets of group dynamics. We have explored how the interplay of group roles and individual choices shapes communication climates and productivity within groups. Understanding the influence of task, building and maintenance, and self-centered roles is crucial for effective group dynamics. Leaders play a key role in guiding their groups towards success through a well-matched leadership style and clear communication. Leadership theories such as traits, situational, functional, and transformational approaches provide valuable insights into effective leadership strategies within group settings.

Facilitating successful meetings requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses not only an understanding of group dynamics but also effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills and adept task management. Exploring problem-solving strategies, decision-making techniques like voting and consensus, and conflict management styles equips individuals with the tools needed to address challenging group interactions. This chapter has illustrated how open communication and maintaining civility can lead to constructive resolutions and improved group cohesion.

Lastly, the chapter underscores the challenges of intercultural communication in group settings. By taking the time and effort to understand other cultures and recognizing cultural differences in the group setting, both leaders and group members are able to implement effective communication strategies to address those issues. Any individual within the group can help bridge cultural gaps and enhance group communication. Understanding cultural nuances, such as individualistic versus collectivist cultures and time orientation, is essential for effective group interactions across diverse cultural backgrounds.

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9.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 9

9.3.6: The Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum

The top cell is an uninterrupted continuum with Autocratic on the left, Democratic in the middle and Participative on the right. An arrow points to the left from Democratic to Autocratic. Another arrow points to the right from Democratic to Participative. Beneath this cell are seven columns of text. From left to right: (beneath "Autocratic") column 1: Owner makes decision and announces it. column 2: Owner sells decision to the team column (in the middle closer to "Democratic") 3: Owner presents ideas and invites questions from the team column 4: Owner presents tentative decisions to the team subject to change column 5: Owner presents problem, gets suggestions from the team, and makes decision (beneath "Participative") column 6: Owner defines limits and asks their team to make a joint decision column 7: Owner permits their team to function within limits they define and asks them to come up with a proposal on which they will all vote.

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9.9: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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9.9.1: Exercises

9.1: Group Member Roles

1. Think about a recent group project or team activity you were part of. Identify the group roles you observed within the team, both positive and negative. Consider how these roles influenced the group dynamics and outcomes. Write down your observations and how you think these roles impacted the overall effectiveness of the group.
2. Choose a role (ie harmonizer, coordinator) and imagine yourself embodying that role in a group setting. Consider how you would approach tasks, interact with other group members, and contribute to the group's progress. Write a short reflection on the challenges and benefits of filling that role and how it aligns with your communication style.
3. Consider a group that may be in your future (future job, a class next session, a volunteer group you may join) What are some roles that would help the group? What group roles would make the group less effective?

9.2: Leadership in Groups

1. Think of a recent situation where you had to take on a leadership role. Describe the context of the situation and explain how your leadership approach was influenced by the specific circumstances. Reflect on whether your leadership style would have been different if the context had been altered.
2. Describe a leader that you know or have known in the past that you perceived as skilled or effective. How did they act and what did they do that was inspirational? Write a 2–3 paragraph reflection of your experience and share it with a classmate.
3. Think of a leader you were challenged to follow or perceived as ineffective. What did they do or say that was ineffective? How would you characterize this leader’s style (use descriptive terms) and why?

9.3: Group Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

1. Think of a recent problem or decision-making scenario you encountered in a group setting. Review the variables of task, talent, and time discussed in the text. Write down how each of these variables influenced the final decision or solution that was chosen by the group.
2. Choose one of the decision-making methods discussed in the text (ie Voting, Consensus). Create a hypothetical scenario where you are part of a group facing a decision. Describe how you would apply the chosen method to reach a resolution and explain the potential benefits and drawbacks of using that method.
3. Imagine you are leading a group discussion where consensus is the desired outcome. Develop a list of guidelines or strategies that you would implement to facilitate the consensus-building process within the group. Consider factors such as active participation, open communication, and resolving conflicts.
4. Choose a recent personal or academic problem that you encountered and successfully resolved. Apply each step of the problem-solving process (Define the problem, Analyze the problem, Establish criteria, Consider possible solutions, Decide on a solution, Implement the solution, Evaluate the solution) to reflect on how you navigated through the process. Write a brief paragraph for each step, detailing your actions and decision-making process. Would working on this problem as a group have made it easier? Harder?

9.4: Conflict Management in Groups

1. Choose a recent conflict situation you experienced in a group setting. Identify the conflict management strategy that was employed. Was the chosen strategy effective in resolving the conflict and maintaining positive group dynamics? Write a brief analysis of the outcomes and lessons learned.
2. What is your preferred conflict management style? Review the three style "menus" described in the text or the five conflict styles. Consider a past group conflict situation and analyze how your conflict style influenced the dynamics and outcomes of the conflict.
3. A major hesitation raised by some people with respect to consensus decision-making is that it requires much more time than voting or other direct methods. In what kind of situation would you be, or have you been, willing to invest “as much time as it takes” to reach consensus in a group?

9.5: Intercultural Communication in Groups

1. Reflect on a personal experience where cultural differences influenced a conflict situation within a group. Identify the specific cultural perspectives at play (e.g., Individualistic versus Collectivist Cultures, Time Orientation, Direct versus Indirect communication). Analyze how these cultural differences impacted the conflict dynamics and outcomes. Write a brief reflection on the challenges faced and lessons learned.
2. Consider your own time orientation preference in terms of short-term versus long-term goals. How do you think this preference influences your communication style and decision-making process in group settings? Write a short reflection discussing how understanding time orientation differences can enhance effective communication and collaboration within diverse groups.
3. Think of a movie where one or more group members exemplify individualism. In what ways do you think this trait affected the group?
4. Think of a movie where one or more group members exemplify community-oriented values. In what ways do you think this trait affected the group?

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9.9.2: Discussion Questions

9.1: Group Member Roles

1. In a group discussion, share examples of positive and negative group roles you have encountered in team settings. Discuss how these roles influenced the group's dynamics and outcomes. How can being aware of these roles help improve group communication and collaboration?
2. Consider a recent group project or team activity you were part of. Discuss the impact of task roles, building and maintenance roles, and self-centered roles on the group's effectiveness. How did these roles contribute to the group's success or challenges?
3. Explore the balance between task-oriented and socio-emotional interaction in successful groups. In a group discussion, analyze how these two types of interaction influence group health, communication norms, and outcomes. Share examples of how effective group roles can enhance group dynamics and productivity.

9.2: Leadership in Groups

1. How do you think the concept of universal leadership traits aligns with the idea that leadership is influenced by individual characteristics and behaviors? Can a leader possess all ten traits simultaneously, or is it more realistic to exhibit a combination of these traits based on different contexts?
2. Do you think situational leadership is the best style? Do you believe that a leader's effectiveness is primarily determined by their ability to adapt to different situations, or by having a consistent leadership style that resonates with their team members? Share examples to support your viewpoint.
3. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers towards a shared vision. How important do you think it is for a leader to possess all four key components of transformational leadership? Can a leader be effective if they excel in some components but lack proficiency in others? Discuss the implications of this leadership style on team dynamics and performance.

9.3: Group Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

1. How do the variables of task, talent, and time impact the decision-making process within a group? Can you provide examples from your own experiences where considering these variables led to a more effective or efficient decision-making outcome?
2. Compare and contrast the decision-making methods in the textbook. In what situations would each method be most suitable for reaching a decision within a group? Discuss the implications of using different decision-making methods on group dynamics and outcomes.
3. Consensus decision-making emphasizes reaching a resolution that all group members can support. What are the key challenges and benefits of seeking consensus within a group setting? How can group leaders effectively guide the consensus-building process to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered and integrated into the final decision?
4. In your opinion, which step of the problem-solving process (Define the problem, Analyze the problem, Establish criteria, Consider possible solutions, Decide on a solution, Implement the solution, Evaluate the solution) is the most crucial for achieving a successful outcome? Share examples or experiences to support your reasoning. How can individuals or groups ensure that they effectively address each step to enhance their problem-solving capabilities?

9.4: Conflict Management in Groups

1. How do cultural values and communication norms influence the choice of conflict management strategies within a group? Discuss the impact of cultural differences on conflict resolution approaches and share examples of how cultural diversity can both enhance and challenge conflict management processes.
2. In conflict situations, the balance between defensiveness and supportiveness in communication plays a crucial role in determining the outcome. How can group members cultivate a supportive communication climate to address conflicts constructively and prevent defensive responses? Share strategies or techniques that promote supportive communication in conflict resolution.
3. Conflict styles vary based on individual concerns for self and others, ranging from integrating to avoiding approaches. Reflect

on a conflict scenario where different conflict styles were exhibited within a group. How did the combination of individual conflict styles impact the group dynamics and decision-making process? Discuss the advantages and limitations of each conflict style in achieving effective conflict resolution.

9.5: Intercultural Communication in Groups

1. How do cultural differences in time orientation impact group communication and decision-making processes? Share examples of how individuals from short-term and long-term oriented cultures may approach tasks, deadlines, and goal-setting differently within a group context. Discuss strategies for bridging time orientation gaps to foster effective collaboration and mutual understanding.
2. In what ways can direct and indirect communication styles influence intercultural group interactions and relationships? Discuss the advantages and challenges of each communication approach in a group setting. How can individuals adapt their communication style to accommodate diverse cultural preferences and enhance cross-cultural communication effectiveness?
3. How do explicit rule cultures and implicit rule cultures shape group dynamics and communication practices? Share examples of how cultural norms regarding rules, guidelines, and expectations impact the clarity and effectiveness of communication within groups. Discuss strategies for navigating these cultural differences.

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10: SPEECH ORGANIZATION

Overview

The interrelated elements of content, structure, and delivery shape a speech's clarity, persuasiveness, and overall impact. Speech construction, comprising the introduction, body, conclusion, and outlines, functions as a set of foundational components that collectively determine how effectively ideas are communicated. When these elements are thoughtfully developed and integrated, speakers present messages in a coherent and engaging manner that promotes both audience comprehension and retention.

Introductions play a critical role in capturing attention, establishing credibility, and clearly articulating purpose. An effective opening motivates audience engagement while providing a cognitive framework for understanding the content that follows. Attention-getting strategies, connections to topic relevance, and well-formulated thesis statements serve as essential tools for orienting listeners and strengthening speaker ethos.

The body of a speech functions as the primary space for idea development and evidence-based reasoning. Moving from a specific purpose to clearly defined main points requires selecting an appropriate organizational pattern and incorporating transitions, internal previews, summaries, and signposts. Effective speeches balance clarity and depth while maintaining an audience-centered approach, ensuring that messages are both memorable and persuasive.

Conclusions serve the dual purpose of signaling closure and reinforcing central ideas. They enhance audience recall and leave a lasting impression by thoughtfully revisiting key themes. Concluding strategies such as calls to action, vivid visualizations, and meaningful quotations can be tailored to the speech type, demonstrating how intentional design strengthens rhetorical impact.

Speech outlines function as essential organizational tools that promote logical structure and proportional development. Whether working outlines, full-sentence outlines, or concise speaking outlines, these planning documents allow speakers to evaluate scope, relevance, logical relationships among main points, and adequacy of supporting evidence. Deliberate outlining fosters cohesion, clarity, and effective delivery, reinforcing the integration of introduction, body, and conclusion.

When preparation, organization, and delivery are aligned, presentations become logically structured, rhetorically effective, and audience-centered. Mastery of these foundational skills is central to successful public communication.

Chapter Goals

- Explain the distinct purposes of introductions, bodies, and conclusions in structuring effective public presentations and how these components contribute to audience engagement and comprehension.
- Formulate precise, audience-centered thesis statements and specific purposes, demonstrating how these guide content selection, organizational patterns, and supporting evidence.
- Apply principles of unity, balance, logical sequencing, and appropriate organizational patterns (e.g., topical, chronological, causal, problem-solution) to create coherent and persuasive main points.
- Select and implement attention-getting techniques, credibility-building approaches, transitions, signposts, and concluding devices to maximize audience understanding, retention, and rhetorical impact.
- Develop working, full-sentence, and speaking outlines to plan, structure, and deliver speeches ethically, efficiently, and with clarity, ensuring alignment with the thesis, main points, and overall purpose.
- Select, design, and integrate effective presentation aids that clarify key ideas, enhance audience understanding and retention, support speaker credibility, and ensure accessible, purposeful communication.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Adequacy
- Attention-Getter
- Audible Aids
- Balance
- Bar Graphs
- Biographical Pattern
- Body (of a speech)
- Categorical or Topical Pattern
- Causal Pattern
- Chart
- Chronological Pattern
- Comparison-Contrast Pattern
- Competence
- Concluding Device
- Conclusion
- Consistency
- Credibility
- Diagrams
- Full-Sentence Outline
- Goodwill
- Graph
- Internal Previews
- Internal Summaries
- Introduction
- Line Graphs
- Logical Flow
- Map
- Objects
- Parallel Structure
- Parallelism
- Photographs and Drawings
- Pie Graphs
- Presentation Aids
- Problem-Cause-Solution Pattern
- Psychological Pattern
- Separation
- Signposts
- Singularity
- Spatial Pattern
- Speaking Outline
- Specific Purpose
- Statistical Chart
- Thesis Statement
- Transitions
- Trustworthiness
- Unity
- Uniformity
- Video or Audio Recordings
- Visual Aids
- Working Outline

10.1: Speech Introductions

10.2: The Body of a Speech

10.3: Speech Conclusions
10.4: Organizing and Outlining
10.5: Presentation Aids
10.6: Chapter Wrap-Up
10.7: References
10.8: Teacher Resources
10.8.1: Exercises
10.8.2: Discussion Questions

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10.1: Speech Introductions

Creating an Introduction

An **introduction** is the gateway to any speech. Although it should take only about 10–15% of total speaking time, its influence extends across the entire presentation. For example, a five-minute speech should devote roughly 45 seconds to the introduction, while a ten-minute speech should allocate about a minute and a half. Despite its brevity, the introduction plays a decisive role in shaping whether audiences remain attentive or disengage before the main message begins. In short, introductions prepare the audience, establish the speaker's presence, and set the tone for the speech.

A strong introduction fulfills five central functions: gaining audience attention and interest, stating the purpose of the speech, establishing the speaker's credibility, providing reasons for the audience to listen, and previewing the main ideas. Each of these goals contributes to ensuring that the audience is both attentive and prepared for the speech's content.

Gaining Audience Attention and Interest

The first responsibility of an introduction is to capture the audience's attention. Many novice speakers assume that listeners will automatically pay attention simply because the speaker is talking. In reality, politeness may keep an audience quiet, but silence does not guarantee engagement. Most people have, at some point, tuned out a lecture, sermon, or presentation. If listeners are not engaged from the outset, regaining their attention later becomes increasingly difficult.



Figure 10.1.1: The focus of this audience shows how a strong introduction converts silence into genuine attention. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Gilad Kavalerchik via Wikimedia Commons)

Effective speakers recognize that audience attention is not a given but must be earned. This requires intentional use of strategies designed to spark curiosity, arouse interest, or create a sense of relevance. Later in this chapter, we will examine a range of attention-getting strategies, including anecdotes, startling facts, rhetorical questions, and humor, that can serve as effective entry points into a topic.

Stating the Purpose of the Speech

The second function of an introduction is to reveal the purpose of the speech. Clarity of purpose ensures that the audience understands the direction and significance of what is to follow. Without this, listeners may be left wondering what the speaker is trying to accomplish. Robert Cavett, founder of the National Speakers Association, captured this idea with his analogy: "When it's

foggy in the pulpit, it's cloudy in the pews."

The **specific purpose** is the single most important idea we want our audience to remember when the speech concludes. This purpose guides research, organization, and the selection of main points. A well-defined purpose also aids the audience, providing a clear and simple takeaway even if they momentarily lose focus during the body of the speech.

A practical method for developing a specific purpose is to complete the sentence: "I want my audience to understand that…." Notice that this phrasing emphasizes the expected audience response rather than the speaker's perspective. This distinction ensures that the purpose centers on audience impact, not speaker intention.

Establishing Speaker Credibility

The third major function of an introduction is to establish **credibility**, or what Aristotle referred to as ethos, which involves not only demonstrating expertise but also cultivating audience trust and showing genuine concern for their interests, since credibility is not an inherent trait of the speaker but rather a perception that is actively formed and continuously reinforced in the minds of the audience.

Building Trust with Your Audience

McCroskey and Teven (1999) identified three components of credibility: competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill.

- **Competence** refers to how knowledgeable or skilled the speaker appears to be. Some individuals are granted competence because of professional positions or titles.
  - For example, Dr. Vivek Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General under the Biden Administration, is perceived as competent in matters of health and wellness. However, competence is topic-specific. Murthy may not be considered credible on Latin American music or culinary methods, just as other well-known figures must establish competence for each new topic. Speakers without formal credentials must demonstrate their knowledge through personal experience, thorough preparation, or well-supported evidence.
- **Trustworthiness** refers to whether the audience perceives the speaker as honest. A loss of trust can be devastating.
  - For example, during the 2009 health care debates, some congressional town halls became hostile when audiences believed legislators were not being truthful. In such contexts, once trust erodes, even accurate information is met with skepticism. Thus, speakers must ensure that their statements are accurate, supported, and delivered transparently.
- **Goodwill**, sometimes called caring, reflects whether the audience perceives the speaker as genuinely concerned for their welfare. Wrench, McCroskey, and Richmond (2008) argue that goodwill is often the most important component of credibility: audiences are more willing to forgive a speaker's mistakes if they believe the speaker cares about their best interests. Conversely, even the most competent and honest speaker may be rejected if perceived as manipulative or self-serving.
  - For example, a teacher presenting on climate change can enhance credibility by citing relevant research, admitting areas where uncertainty exists, and showing concern for students' understanding and future impact. Even if the teacher is highly knowledgeable, failing to demonstrate honesty or care for the audience could undermine their perceived credibility.

Since credibility is fundamentally audience-driven, speakers must actively and intentionally communicate why they are qualified, demonstrate honesty in their claims, and consistently show concern for the audience's needs, because without these elements, even the most well-prepared speech may fail to resonate or persuade.

Providing the Audience Reasons to Listen

An introduction should also demonstrate why the topic matters to the audience. Audiences may politely endure irrelevant speeches, but their engagement will fade quickly if they cannot see a connection to their own lives. Effective speakers explicitly link their message to audience concerns, needs, or goals rather than leaving listeners to make those connections themselves.

For example, a presentation on environmental policy might explain how proposed changes directly affect students' tuition fees, local taxes, or employment opportunities. Building this bridge early fosters investment in the speech and reduces the risk of

audience detachment.

Previewing Main Ideas

The final function of an introduction is to preview the main ideas of the speech. A preview acts as a roadmap, signaling to listeners the structure and direction of the message. In public speaking, this is sometimes referred to as signposting because it guides audiences through the presentation.

Most speeches contain three to five major points. Stating these points in advance demonstrates organization and makes the content easier to follow. Research by Baker (1965) showed that speakers perceived as disorganized were judged less credible than those with clear structure. Furthermore, previews help audiences reorient themselves if they momentarily lose focus. For example:

> "To understand workplace bullying, I will first define its types, then describe common characteristics of bullies and targets, and finally explore potential solutions."

Strategies for Gaining Attention

While the five functions provide the foundational framework for introductions and help guide speakers in structuring their opening remarks, it is equally important that speakers thoughtfully select an appropriate attention-getting strategy that will immediately engage the audience and establish a connection between the listeners and the topic.

An **attention-getter** is the opening statement or technique a speaker uses at the beginning of a speech to capture the audience's interest and encourage them to listen.

10 Ways to Gain Your Audience's Attention

Miller (1946) identified ten common methods, including:

1. **Directly stating the subject;**
   - "Today, I'm going to talk about the effects of social media on mental health."
2. **Referencing the audience;**
   - "By a show of hands, how many of you checked your phone within five minutes of waking up this morning?"
3. **Using quotations;**
   - "As Maya Angelou once said, 'People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.'"
4. **Citing current or historical events;**
   - "Just last week, wildfires in California destroyed over 200,000 acres, reminding us how urgent the climate crisis has become."
5. **Telling anecdotes or parables;**
   - "When I was ten years old, my family lost power for two weeks after a hurricane. That experience changed how I think about emergency preparedness."
6. **Making startling statements;**
   - "More people worldwide have access to a mobile phone than to clean drinking water."
7. **Asking rhetorical or response questions;**
   - "Have you ever stopped to think about how much plastic you used just today?"
8. **Incorporating humor;**
   - "They say public speaking is people's number-one fear. Number two is death. Which means, at a funeral, most of us would rather be in the casket than give the eulogy."
9. **Offering personal stories; and**
   - "When I was the first in my family to go to college, I felt both proud and terrified. That journey taught me lessons I want to share with you today."
10. **Referencing the occasion.**
    - "As we gather here to celebrate your graduation, it's the perfect time to reflect on the power of perseverance and resilience."

When selecting an attention-getter, speakers should carefully consider four key factors: (1) audience appropriateness, (2) purpose of the speech, (3) relevance to the topic, and (4) suitability to the occasion. For instance, humor may be highly effective in an after-dinner speech but completely inappropriate in a eulogy. Similarly, a startling statistic about malnutrition may be appropriate in a persuasive speech on global hunger but would feel jarring and out of place in an entertaining after-dinner talk.

Regardless of which device a speaker chooses, the attention-getter must not only capture the audience's focus but also transition smoothly into the topic, maintain clear relevance throughout, and establish the appropriate tone and expectations for the remainder of the speech, because a poorly chosen or disconnected opening can diminish audience engagement and undermine the speaker's effectiveness.

Linking, Credibility, Thesis, and Preview

After the attention-getter, speakers must quickly link it to the topic, explain why the topic matters, establish credibility, present a thesis, and preview main points. These components, while distinct, function together to transition the audience from curiosity to comprehension.

Try This 10.1.1 Connecting the Pieces

- **Link to topic** ensures that the opening device flows naturally into the subject matter.
- **Reasons to listen** highlight the significance of the topic for the audience.
- **Credibility statements** reassure the audience that the speaker is competent, trustworthy, and caring.
- **Thesis statements** clarify the central idea or argument in a concise declarative sentence.
- **Previews** outline the speech structure and guide the listener's expectations.

The Role of the Thesis Statement

Among these elements, the thesis is especially vital. A strong **thesis statement** provides clarity to both the speaker and the audience by expressing the speech's main idea in a single sentence. It serves four major functions: (1) articulating the specific purpose, (2) organizing main points, (3) focusing research, and (4) enhancing delivery.

For example, "Today, I will clarify what plagiarism is and illustrate its different forms to show how it undermines learning" is stronger than "Today, I want to discuss academic cheating." The former is precise, organized, and purposeful, while the latter is vague.

A clear thesis also streamlines research by guiding the speaker toward relevant material and away from tangents. It ensures that supporting points reinforce the central claim rather than scatter into unrelated directions. Finally, when delivered with emphasis, a thesis gives the audience a clear anchor for understanding the speech's intent.

In public speaking, the terms "thesis" and "proposition" are often used interchangeably. Both refer to the central idea or claim that a speaker wants the audience to understand, accept, or act upon. While some textbooks or instructors may prefer one term over the other, they mean the same thing in practice: the guiding statement around which your entire speech is organized.

For consistency in this textbook, we will primarily use "thesis statement", but be aware that many speech teachers refer to the same concept as a "proposition." (However, 13.3: Persuasive Speaking will discuss Persuasive Propositions specifically.) Whenever you encounter either term, know that it represents the main idea of your speech and serves as the foundation for your arguments, evidence, and overall organization.

"Smart Dust Speech" – An Introduction in Action

Smart dust refers to networks of tiny, wireless microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) that integrate sensors, processors, and communication capabilities. These microscopic devices can autonomously collect and transmit data from their surroundings, enabling real-time monitoring and analysis across multiple domains, including healthcare, environmental monitoring, and industrial applications such as machinery oversight and maintenance optimization. Despite the wide-ranging potential, challenges remain in developing sustainable power sources and reliable communication for such small devices, which researchers are addressing through innovative energy-harvesting techniques (Amarel, 2025).

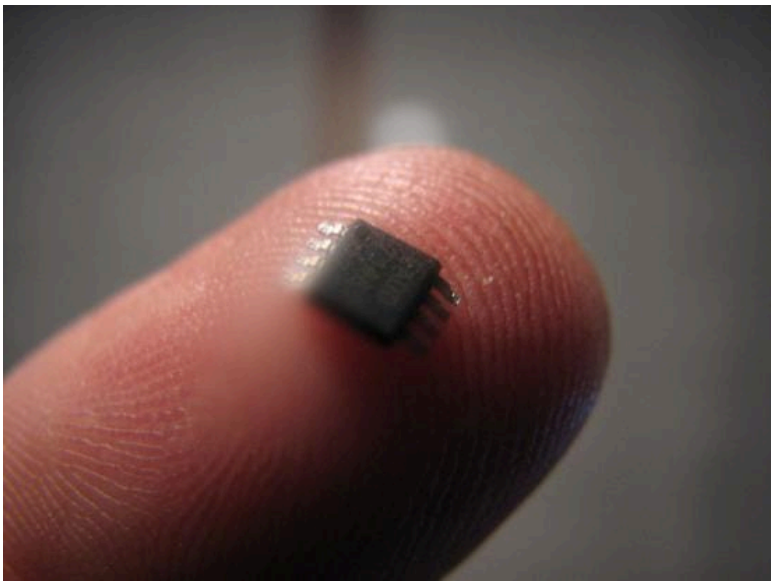


Figure 10.1.2: A tiny microchip balanced on a fingertip. (CC BY 2.0; fdecomite via Flickr)

Consider the following introduction to a speech on “smart dust”:

> “Michael Crichton’s novel *Prey* describes swarms of nanomachines, blurring the line between science fiction and reality. Research in electrical engineering has developed microelectromechanical sensors (MEMS) with applications in health care, disaster detection, and defense. Business leaders already consider smart dust a top emerging technology, with implications across industries. The speaker cites peer-reviewed research and Fortune Magazine. The speech will explain what smart dust is and explore its potential applications. The body will describe smart dust’s mechanics, military applications, and nonmilitary uses.”

The introduction includes:

- **Attention-getter:** Michael Crichton’s novel *Prey* describes swarms of nanomachines, blurring the line between science fiction and reality.
- **Link to topic:** Research in electrical engineering has developed microelectromechanical sensors (MEMS) with applications in health care, disaster detection, and defense.
- **Reasons to listen:** Business leaders already consider smart dust a top emerging technology, with implications across industries.
- **Credibility:** The speaker cites peer-reviewed research and Fortune Magazine.
- **Thesis:** The speech will explain what smart dust is and explore its potential applications.
- **Preview:** The body will describe smart dust’s mechanics, military applications, and nonmilitary uses.

This example demonstrates how the six parts of an introduction (attention-getter, link, reasons to listen, credibility, thesis, and preview) function together to engage the audience, establish context, and set expectations for the speech.

Key Takeaways

- Introductions, while brief (10–15% of total speaking time), exert substantial influence on audience engagement and perception.
- Effective introductions accomplish five key functions: gain attention, state purpose, establish credibility, provide audience reasons to listen, and preview main ideas.
- Speaker credibility is constructed through competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill, reflecting audience perception rather than inherent traits.
- Previews, or signposting of main points, enhance organizational clarity and aid audience retention.
- Attention-getting strategies must be relevant to the topic, contextually appropriate, and seamlessly linked to the main argument.

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10.2: The Body of a Speech

Building the Body

Public speeches are traditionally structured into three essential parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction sets the stage, while the conclusion provides closure and reinforces key ideas. The **body**, however, is where the real substance lies. It is in the body that a speaker delivers the core arguments, presents supporting evidence, and develops ideas that fulfill the speech's purpose.

The body of a speech should not be a random collection of facts or anecdotes. Instead, it must be strategically designed and organized with intentionality to ensure clarity, coherence, and impact. Too often, inexperienced speakers compile information haphazardly, leaving audiences confused or disengaged. Strategic organization transforms information into a meaningful message, allowing the audience to see not only *what* is being said but also *why* it matters.

This chapter explores how to move from a speech's specific purpose to carefully constructed main points, how to balance and structure those points, and how to select an organizational pattern that supports the speech's goals. We also examine tools such as transitions, internal previews, internal summaries, and signposts that guide audiences through the body of a speech.

From Specific Purpose to Main Points

Before developing main points, speakers must be clear on their specific purpose. The general purpose of a speech may be to inform, persuade, or entertain. The specific purpose refines this general goal by addressing who the audience is, what they need to know, and how the speaker intends to deliver that information.

Think About This 10.2.1 Approaching Topics in Different Ways

For example, the general topic of open-source software can be approached in many ways:

- **Informative purpose**: "To inform a group of school administrators about open-source software packages that could be used in their districts."
- **Persuasive purpose**: "To persuade college students to switch from Microsoft Office to OpenOffice."
- **Entertaining purpose**: "To amuse a business audience with a mock eulogy for proprietary software, highlighting the rise of open-source alternatives."

Each purpose directs the body of the speech differently, even though the general topic remains the same. A clear specific purpose is the foundation upon which main points are built.

Determining the Number of Main Points

Once the specific purpose is established, speakers must decide how many main points to include. Research on memory and listening suggests that people retain limited amounts of information after a speech (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988). Well-organized content improves retention (Dunham, 1964; Smith, 1951; Thompson, 1960).

For classroom speeches, the rule of thumb is:

- Two main points for speeches under three minutes.
- Three main points for speeches lasting three to ten minutes.

Why so few? As LeFrancois (1999) notes, people remember information better when it is meaningful, organized, distinctive, and simple. With only two or three main points, speakers can provide depth through examples, statistics, and narratives while keeping the structure memorable.

Narrowing and Grouping Main Points

Brainstorming is a useful step for identifying possible content because it allows speakers to generate a wide range of ideas without worrying about order or relevance at first. This process encourages creativity and ensures that no potential point is overlooked, providing a rich pool of material to later refine and organize.

Think About This 10.2.2 Creating Main Points

For instance, when preparing a speech to inform school administrators about open-source software, a speaker might brainstorm:

- Define open-source software.
- Review its history.
- List advantages and disadvantages.
- Describe examples of educational software.
- Outline the needs of school districts.
- Discuss problems encountered with open-source adoption.

At first glance, this list seems too long for a short speech. The process of grouping allows speakers to combine related ideas into broader categories. (Chapter 12: Informative Speaking further explores grouping and other similar processes.)

In this example, the brainstormed items could be condensed into three main points:

1. How school districts use software in their operations.
2. What open-source software is, including its history, advantages, disadvantages, and value.
3. Examples of educational open-source packages suited for schools.

Grouping related ideas into broader categories helps ensure that the speech remains focused and coherent, guiding the audience through the main points while still providing ample space to include examples, evidence, anecdotes, and other supporting details that strengthen understanding and engagement.

Guidelines for Developing Main Points

Once potential main points are identified, speakers should refine them using several key guidelines. **Unity** requires that all points directly support the speech's specific purpose; even interesting ideas should be cut if they do not advance that purpose.

Separation ensures that each point is distinct and avoids excessive overlap, which can confuse listeners. For example, a speech on the health benefits of fruit should not combine a broad claim like "fruit is healthy" with separate points on apples and oranges, since the first overlaps too heavily with the others.

Balance calls for giving main points relatively equal attention. Devoting ten minutes to one idea and only thirty seconds to another creates imbalance and undermines the neglected material's importance.

Parallel structure emphasizes consistency in phrasing main points, helping clarity and flow. A speaker should avoid mixing a statement such as "School districts use software" with a question like "What is open-source software?" Instead, all points should be framed in the same grammatical style.

Finally, **logical flow** ensures that points follow a sensible order. In some cases, the sequence is obvious, such as presenting history before solutions, while in others it requires careful judgment. For instance, in a speech on "rider law legislation," it is clearer to define the problem, explain the solution, and then argue for adoption rather than presenting these elements out of order.

Organizational Patterns

Speakers can structure main points using a variety of organizational patterns, each suited to different purposes and topics.

Choosing the right pattern helps ensure that ideas are clear, logical, and easy for audiences to follow.



Figure 10.2.1: An engaged audience illustrating how effective structuring of main points can captivate and maintain audience attention. (CC BY-SA 2.0; U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv via Wikimedia Commons)

One common approach is the **categorical or topical pattern**, which groups ideas into categories. For example, when persuading high school juniors to apply to a university, a speaker might organize the message around dorm life, classroom life, and campus life. Similarly, a **comparison-contrast pattern** highlights similarities and differences, such as comparing the effects of Drug X and Drug Y.

Other patterns rely on sequencing or physical arrangement. A **spatial pattern** organizes points by physical location, such as describing the Confederate states by region or explaining parts of the urinary system. A **chronological pattern** follows a timeline, such as examining Winston Churchill's writings before, during, and after World War II. A **biographical pattern** is often chronological but focuses specifically on a person's life story, such as tracing the early life and career of Marilyn Manson.

In addition, some patterns emphasize causes and solutions. A **causal pattern** examines cause-and-effect relationships, such as analyzing the causes of deforestation in the Amazon and its environmental and social effects. A **problem-cause-solution pattern** builds on this by identifying a problem, explaining its causes, and offering solutions; for example, addressing student absenteeism by examining causes such as transportation issues and family responsibilities, and proposing solutions like flexible scheduling and school bus programs.

Finally, a **psychological pattern** follows a chain of reasoning in which one idea leads naturally to the next. For instance, a speaker might argue that laughter affects the body, which aids healing, which in turn supports nurses' use of humor in patient care.

Think About This 10.2.3 Finding Your Pattern

Speeches can be organized according to different patterns, each suited to a particular purpose or method of presenting information. The following examples illustrate key organizational patterns, along with the reasoning for why each pattern is appropriate:

Categorical/Topical Pattern
Example topic: Persuading high school juniors to apply to a university

- **Ideas:** Dorm life, classroom experience, campus activities
- **Why it fits:** Each category is distinct, but all support the overall goal of persuading students. The speech doesn't follow time or cause, it's grouped by theme.

Comparison/Contrast Pattern
Example topic: Evaluating two study techniques

- **Ideas:** Flashcards vs. summarizing notes
- **Why it fits:** Focuses on similarities and differences to help the audience choose the better method for their goals. The structure explicitly highlights contrast.

Spatial Pattern
Example topic: Touring a university campus

- **Ideas:** North end (science buildings), center (library and student union), south end (athletic fields and dorms)
- **Why it fits:** Organizes information based on physical location, moving logically through space instead of time or cause.

Chronological Pattern
Example topic: Winston Churchill's writings

- **Ideas:** Before WWII, during WWII, after WWII
- **Why it fits:** Follows a timeline, showing progression and development over time. Emphasizes the sequence of events.

Biographical Pattern
Example topic: Life of Malala Yousafzai

- **Ideas:** Childhood in Pakistan, activism for girls' education, surviving an assassination attempt, winning the Nobel Peace Prize
- **Why it fits:** Focuses on the chronological story of one person's life, showing how experiences and events shaped her activism and public impact.

Causal Pattern
Example topic: Deforestation in the Amazon

- **Ideas:** Causes (logging, agriculture expansion, mining) → Effects (loss of biodiversity, climate change, disruption of indigenous communities)
- **Why it fits:** Highlights the chain of cause-and-effect in an environmental issue, helping the audience see the consequences of specific actions.

Problem-Cause-Solution Pattern
Example topic: Reducing youth vandalism

- **Ideas:** Problem (vandalism), causes (lack of activities, peer pressure, no supervision), solutions (curfews, community centers, mentorship)
- **Why it fits:** Clearly identifies a problem, explains why it exists, and proposes remedies: a logical progression from issue to action.

Psychological Pattern
Example topic: Humor in nursing

- **Ideas:** Laughter → physical benefits → healing → improved nursing care
- **Why it fits:** One idea naturally leads to the next in a chain of reasoning, rather than grouping by topic or time.

Selecting the most effective organizational pattern depends on the topic, the speech's purpose, and the intended audience. In some cases, speakers may even combine patterns, such as comparing potential solutions within the larger structure of a problem-cause-solution framework.

Keeping the Speech Moving

Even with strong main points, a speech can fail if the audience feels lost. Unlike readers, listeners cannot pause, reread, or "rewind" confusing material. To keep audiences oriented, speakers rely on four key techniques that act as navigational aids throughout a presentation.



Figure 10.2.2: An attentive crowd, highlighting the importance of using clear organizational cues and navigational techniques to keep listeners oriented throughout a speech. (CC0; Stockcake via Stockcake)

Transitions are complete sentences that connect major points by summarizing what has just been discussed and previewing what comes next. For example, a speaker might say, “Now that we’ve examined the history of alcohol abuse, let’s turn to its effects on Native communities.” Transitions ensure the speech flows smoothly from one idea to another, preventing abrupt or confusing shifts.

Internal previews function like road maps within a main point. They outline upcoming subpoints, helping the audience anticipate how ideas will unfold. For instance, a speaker might say, “To understand recycling’s importance, we will first consider its benefits and then explore how it helps communities.” These statements give structure and prepare listeners for the information to follow.

Internal summaries briefly review material just covered, reinforcing understanding and improving retention. A speaker addressing school bullying, for example, might conclude a section by stating, “In short, bullying harms students academically, emotionally, and socially.” By pausing to consolidate information, internal summaries help audiences process what they have heard before moving forward.

Finally, **signposts** are concise verbal markers (such as “first,” “second,” and “finally”) that orient listeners to a speaker’s progression. They can also highlight importance with phrases like “Above all” or “The key takeaway here is…” These small cues are powerful in keeping audiences anchored throughout a speech.

Together, transitions, internal previews, internal summaries, and signposts ensure that speeches are navigable, logical, and easy to follow. By strategically incorporating these devices, speakers create a sense of clarity and direction that allows audiences to fully engage with the message.

"Smart Dust Speech" — The Body in Action

A continuation of the speech on “smart dust” illustrates how main points and transitions can be applied:

- **Main Point 1**
  - Define smart dust and explain its origins, referencing Dr. Kris Pister’s 1998 DARPA-funded project and subsequent research.

Transition: “Now that we’ve examined what smart dust is, let’s explore military applications.”

- **Main Point 2**
  - Military uses, including battlefield surveillance, treaty monitoring, homeland security, and WMD detection.

Transition: “Now that we’ve explored some military benefits, let’s turn to civilian applications.”

- **Main Point 3**
  - Civilian uses, such as energy management, infrastructure monitoring, product quality control, and medical diagnostics.

The speech follows a categorical/topical pattern, dividing content into technology definition, military uses, and civilian uses. Transitions, supporting evidence, and clear categorization keep the body coherent.

Key Takeaways

- The body should be carefully organized to reflect the speech's specific purpose and maintain audience comprehension.
- Two to three main points are optimal for short speeches, balancing clarity, memorability, and depth of development.
- Main points must adhere to principles of unity, distinction, balance, parallel structure, and logical sequencing.
- Organizational patterns, including topical, chronological, comparison/contrast, causal, problem-cause-solution, and others, structure content to enhance clarity and persuasiveness.
- Use of transitions, internal previews, summaries, and signposts ensures that audiences can follow the argument and retain information.

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10.3: Speech Conclusions

Crafting a Conclusion

Many speakers breathe a sigh of relief when reaching the end of a speech. Students often finish their last point with phrases such as “Okay, I’m done,” “Thanks, now what?” or “So yeah…” While these reactions are understandable, they also undermine the hard work invested in the introduction and body. The conclusion is not merely an ending point; it is the speaker’s final opportunity to reinforce key ideas, leave a strong impression, and guide the audience back from the world of the speech to everyday reality.

A weak conclusion drains energy from the speech, leaving audiences unsatisfied or confused. A strong conclusion, on the other hand, provides closure, emphasizes the central message, and enhances recall. Just as the introduction invites the audience into the speech and the body sustains their engagement, the conclusion must skillfully close the experience.

This chapter explores the two central functions of a conclusion, the three steps to building an effective conclusion, and the ten concluding devices identified by Miller (1946). We also analyze a sample conclusion to illustrate how these elements come together in practice.

The Functions of a Conclusion

The **conclusion** of a speech serves two primary functions: to signal the end of the presentation and to enhance audience recall of the central message. Beyond simply marking the conclusion, it provides an opportunity for the speaker to reinforce the main ideas, emphasize the significance of the topic, and leave a lasting impression that ensures the audience remembers the key points long after the speech has ended.

Signaling the End

The first and most essential role of a conclusion is to signal clearly and unmistakably that the speech is drawing to a close, because audiences should never be left uncertain about whether the speaker has simply run out of words or is intentionally wrapping up; failing to provide this closure through verbal cues, transitional phrases, or intentional summary can leave listeners feeling confused, unfulfilled, or disengaged.



Figure 10.3.1: A classic illustration from Looney Tunes stating "The End." (CC BY-SA 4.0; Looney Tunes via Wikimedia Commons)

Figure 10.3.1 is also reminiscent of the Looney Tunes' other popular phrase, "That's all, folks!" Both sentiments indicate to the audience that the cartoon has come to an end. By deliberately signaling the end, speakers give their audience the opportunity to

shift mentally into closure mode, absorb the final points, and leave the presentation with a clear understanding of the speech's overarching message and purpose, rather than walking away with ambiguity or frustration.

Enhancing Audience Recall

The second function is to strengthen the memory of the speech's message. The psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus (1885) introduced the serial position effect, which demonstrates that people remember the first (primacy) and last (recency) items in a sequence more easily than those in the middle. In public speaking, this means that material covered in the introduction and conclusion is especially memorable. Later research by Ehrensberger (1945) confirmed that the conclusion of a speech often has the highest recall value, making it a vital opportunity to reinforce central ideas.

The Three Steps of an Effective Conclusion

A well-crafted conclusion typically includes three steps: (1) a restatement of the thesis, (2) a review of the main points, and (3) a concluding device.

Step 1: Restate the Thesis

The thesis, introduced at the beginning of the speech, should be restated in the conclusion using the past tense. This reminds the audience of the speech's overarching purpose.

- **Thesis (Introduction):** "I will analyze Barack Obama's use of lyricism in his July 2008 speech, *A World That Stands as One*."
- **Restated Thesis (Conclusion):** "In the past few minutes, I have analyzed Barack Obama's use of lyricism in his July 2008 speech, *A World That Stands as One*."

This subtle shift reinforces the main idea while signaling that the analysis has been completed.

Step 2: Review the Main Points

The second step is to briefly review the speech's main points. Oral communication relies heavily on repetition. Previewing points in the introduction, explaining them in the body, and reviewing them in the conclusion increases the likelihood that audiences will retain them.

- **Preview (Introduction)**: "To understand gender and communication, I will first differentiate between biological sex and gender, then explain the history of gender research, and finally examine key findings."
- **Review (Conclusion)**: "Today, we differentiated between biological sex and gender, explored the history of gender research, and analyzed a series of important studies."

Both versions contain the same three points, but the review uses the past tense to summarize what was covered.

Step 3: Provide a Concluding Device

The **concluding device** is the final thought left with the audience. Just as gymnasts aim to "stick the landing" on a dismount, speakers should close smoothly and deliberately rather than trailing off awkwardly. Miller (1946) identified ten common concluding devices that provide closure and lasting impact.

Concluding Devices

- **Challenge:** Calls the audience to engage in an activity requiring effort or change.
  - For example, a speaker on health might challenge listeners to eat two more servings of vegetables daily.
- **Quotation:** Ends with a relevant quotation, either thought-provoking or motivational.
  - For example, citing Solzhenitsyn to underscore the power of writers, or quoting Martin Luther King Jr. to emphasize the courage required for activism.

- **Summary:** Extends the review of main points, useful for complex or technical material. (This device is more common in lengthy speeches than in short classroom presentations.)
  - Insert text here.
- **Visualization of the Future:** Invites the audience to imagine a positive or negative future related to the speech topic.
  - For example, envisioning a classroom where video games enhance learning or a society without illiteracy.
- **Appeal for Action (Call-to-Action):** Asks the audience to adopt a specific behavior or attitude.
  - This may be a general appeal (e.g., vote, recycle, donate) or an immediate call-to-action, such as signing a petition during the speech.
- **Inspiration:** Aims to stir strong emotions.
  - For instance, concluding a speech on domestic violence by reading Paulette Kelly's poem *I Got Flowers Today* evokes both empathy and urgency.
- **Advice:** Offers the speaker's opinion about what should be done, typically effective when the speaker has recognized expertise.
  - Insert text here.
- **Proposal of a Solution:** Suggests a resolution to the problem discussed in the speech.
  - For example, advocating for community-based art programs as a solution to declining arts education.
- **Question:** Ends with a rhetorical question that encourages reflection, such as asking audiences to consider what kind of world they want their children to inherit.
- **Reference to Audience:** Directly emphasizes benefits for listeners, answering "What's in it for me?"
  - For example, concluding a speech on stress management by listing health benefits such as lower blood pressure and stronger immunity.

Different concluding devices work better depending on the type of speech. Informative speeches often end with summaries, quotations, or visualizations, while persuasive speeches frequently employ challenges, calls-to-action, or solutions.

Think About This 10.3.1 Applying Concluding Devices

Speakers can conclude their presentations using a variety of techniques, each designed to leave a lasting impression, reinforce the message, or motivate the audience to think or act. The following examples illustrate common strategies for effective speech endings:

Challenge
Example topic: Healthy eating

- **Idea:** Ask the audience to eat two additional servings of vegetables every day for one week.
- **Why it fits:** Directly engages the audience in taking measurable action that requires effort and behavior change.

Quotation
Example topic: Courage in activism

- **Idea:** End with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr.: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."
- **Why it fits:** Leaves the audience with a memorable, thought-provoking statement that reinforces the speech's message.

Summary
Example topic: Steps to improve workplace productivity

- **Idea:** Review key points: time management, delegation, prioritization, and minimizing distractions.
- **Why it fits:** Reinforces complex information for clarity and retention, especially useful in longer presentations.

Visualization of the Future
Example topic: Literacy programs

- **Idea:** Invite the audience to imagine a world where every child can read, creating communities free of illiteracy and poverty.
- **Why it fits:** Helps the audience picture tangible benefits or consequences, making the speech more compelling.

Appeal for Action (Call-to-Action)
Example topic: Environmental conservation

- **Idea:** Encourage listeners to sign a petition to protect local green spaces or to commit to reducing single-use plastics.
- **Why it fits:** Provides a clear, actionable step the audience can take immediately or in the near future.

Inspiration
Example topic: Domestic violence awareness

- **Idea:** Conclude by reading a poem or sharing a moving survivor story to evoke empathy and urgency.
- **Why it fits:** Engages the audience emotionally, inspiring a deeper connection to the topic.

Advice
Example topic: Career development

- **Idea:** Recommend networking consistently, seeking mentorship, and maintaining a personal growth plan.
- **Why it fits:** Offers expert guidance that the audience can apply to their own lives.

Proposal of a Solution
Example topic: Declining arts education

- **Idea:** Advocate for community-based art programs and school partnerships to reinvigorate arts access.
- **Why it fits:** Directly addresses a problem with a clear, feasible solution.

Question
Example topic: Climate change

- **Idea:** End with a rhetorical question: “What kind of planet will we leave for the next generation if we do nothing today?”
- **Why it fits:** Prompts reflection and personal engagement without requiring a spoken answer.

Reference to Audience
Example topic: Stress management

- **Idea:** Highlight benefits for the audience: improved sleep, lower blood pressure, better focus, and enhanced mood.
- **Why it fits:** Directly connects the speech’s content to the audience’s personal interests or well-being.

Selecting the right concluding device depends on the speaker’s purpose and audience. By understanding the variety of techniques available, speakers can craft endings that resonate, reinforce key points, and leave a lasting impression.

"Smart Dust Speech" – A Conclusion in Action

To illustrate these steps, consider the following conclusion from the speech on “smart dust":

> “Today, we’ve explored how smart dust may impact our lives by examining what smart dust is, how the U.S. military might use it, and how civilian applications could emerge. While smart dust is quickly moving from science fiction to science fact, experts suggest its full potential may not be realized until 2025. Although privacy concerns remain, Dr. Kris Pister argues that the benefits of this technology outweigh the risks. As with all scientific progress, the challenge is balancing innovation with ethical responsibility.”

This conclusion includes:

- **Restated thesis:** understanding smart dust and its uses.
- **Review of main points:** definition, military applications, civilian applications.
- **Concluding device:** a quotation and visualization of the future.

The conclusion ties back to the introduction’s reference to Michael Crichton’s *Prey* while offering a realistic outlook. It also acknowledges ethical concerns, reinforcing the need for critical evaluation.

Key Takeaways

- A strong conclusion signals the end of a speech and reinforces the audience memory of key concepts.
- Effective conclusions typically include three components: a restatement of the thesis, a review of main points, and a concluding device.
- Concluding devices include challenge, quotation, summary, visualization, call to action, inspiration, advice, solution, question, and audience reference.
- Different speech types favor different devices: informative speeches often utilize summaries and visualizations, whereas persuasive speeches emphasize calls-to-action or proposed solutions.
- A well-crafted conclusion integrates with the introduction and body to provide coherence, closure, and lasting audience engagement.

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10.4: Organizing and Outlining

Effective Organization

An effective speech requires clear organization, ensuring that your audience can understand and follow your message. Even if you are highly knowledgeable about your topic, you must present information that the audience may not know and explain connections that might not be immediately obvious. Using a standard outline helps you determine your main points, select supporting evidence, and choose appropriate language. Without an outline, a speech risks losing logical coherence and can sound like a disconnected list of points, leaving your audience relieved when it ends.

A full-sentence outline provides a strong foundation for your message. It begins with a clear and specific purpose, which helps you develop a concrete thesis statement. A focused thesis allows you to exclude irrelevant information, concentrate only on what supports your argument, reduce the amount of research needed, and select the type of supporting evidence required. In addition, a full-sentence outline improves recall for both you and your audience, since live listeners cannot pause or "rewind" your message if they miss a point.

Although many students resist creating full-sentence outlines, viewing them as busywork or overly time-consuming, those who carefully complete them tend to deliver more coherent and persuasive speeches. The effort invested in outlining pays off in stronger message unity and clarity.

Testing Your Outline

Testing an outline allows speakers to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and logical coherence of their planned content before actual delivery. By reviewing each main point and supporting detail in relation to the thesis, speakers can identify areas that may require expansion, trimming, or reorganization. This process ensures that the speech remains focused, persuasive, and appropriately scoped for the audience, minimizing the risk of confusion or tangential information during delivery.

Scope of Content

Your thesis acts as a compass for your outline. Each main point must directly support the thesis. For instance, if your speech's purpose is to inform property owners about the economics of wind farms, the main points should address land costs, maintenance requirements, and energy output profitability. A discussion of environmental impacts, while interesting, would fall outside the speech's scope. Outlining allows you to visually test the scope of your content by comparing each main point to the thesis and ensuring all information is relevant.

Logical Relations Between Points

Main points should be arranged according to a clear and logical pattern to help your audience follow your ideas easily and see how each point connects to the overall purpose of your speech.

Try This 10.4.1 Choosing the Right Organizational Pattern

When considering a speech you might give, ask yourself:

- Are my points naturally grouped by category or theme?
  - If so, a **categorical/topical pattern** may work best.
- Am I comparing two ideas or showing their differences?
  - Then a **comparison-contrast pattern** could highlight similarities and distinctions.
- Does my topic relate to space, location, or layout?
  - If yes, a **spatial pattern** may help the audience visualize.
- Is there a timeline or sequence of events that matters?

    - A **chronological pattern** will make cause-and-effect or development easier to follow.
- Am I telling the story of a person or their achievements?
    - A **biographical pattern** can structure the speech around key life events.
- Does my topic require showing how one factor causes another?
    - A **causal pattern** will help illustrate relationships clearly.
- Do I want to identify a problem and then explain why it exists and how to fix it?
    - Use a **problem-cause-solution pattern**.
- Is my argument a logical chain where one idea naturally leads to the next?
    - Then a **psychological pattern** can guide the audience step by step.

Choosing the right pattern is not just about filling in examples: it's about ensuring that your points logically support each other and connect clearly to your thesis. Before finalizing your outline, ask yourself:

- Do my points flow naturally for the audience to follow?
- Does the order reinforce the purpose of my speech?
- Would changing the pattern improve clarity or engagement?

By reflecting on these questions, you can check that your main points and organizational pattern align with the goals of your speech, making it easier for your audience to understand, remember, and act on your message.

Choosing the right organizational pattern is critical because it ensures that your main points relate logically to one another and clearly connect to your thesis, making it significantly easier for your audience to follow your reasoning and retain the key messages of your speech.

Relevance and Adequacy of Supporting Ideas

Each main point requires authoritative supporting evidence. For example, in the wind farm example, the claim that less land is needed than for other energy sources should be supported with data from experts in economics, engineering, or energy studies. Evidence should be consistent across points, clearly cited, and included within the speech, because listeners cannot refer to a reference page as they would in a research paper. Using appropriate and adequate evidence ensures your audience understands your claims and perceives them as credible.

Balance and Proportion

A full-sentence outline also reveals whether main points receive proportional attention. If one point contains many supporting details while another has very few, either trim the first or expand the others. Each main point should carry approximately equal weight to maintain a balanced and well-structured speech.

Using Outlines in Speech Preparation

Using outlines during speech preparation provides a structured framework for developing ideas, arranging supporting evidence, and maintaining a coherent flow from introduction to conclusion. Outlines act as a blueprint, helping speakers test connections between points, refine content, and plan transitions. Whether through a working outline, full-sentence outline, or speaking outline, this systematic approach enhances both speaker confidence and audience comprehension, ensuring that the message is communicated clearly and effectively.

Working Outline

A **working outline** is the initial framework for your speech. It is flexible and designed to evolve throughout the preparation process. It includes the general and specific purpose, introduction (including a grabber), thesis statement, preview, three main points, conclusion, and references. The working outline moves from general claims to supporting details, allowing you to test whether each point is logically connected and supported by evidence. For instance, if you claim coal mining is hazardous but cannot find authoritative data, this stage allows you to adjust your point while maintaining alignment with the thesis.

Full-Sentence Outline

A **full-sentence outline** contains complete sentences for every section of your speech, including main points, supporting points, and transitions. Writing in full sentences ensures clarity, helps estimate presentation time, and allows for ethical preparation by providing complete references where necessary. Labels for each part of the speech, such as introduction, main points, and transitions, make it easier to locate information, maintain focus, and prepare a speaking outline.

Speaking Outline

The **speaking outline** is a condensed version of the full-sentence outline, designed for oral delivery. Typically, speakers use five 4 × 6 note cards: one for the introduction, one for each main point, and one for the conclusion. Cards should include key words, phrases, and select quotations. Numbering the cards and writing on one side only reduces distractions and ensures smooth delivery. Full quotations may require an additional card when exact wording is essential. Well-prepared cards allow you to maintain eye contact, use gestures, and avoid reading directly from the full-sentence outline.

Principles of a Strong Outline

Outlines should adhere to five essential standards that promote clarity, coherence, and effectiveness in speech preparation and delivery. By following these guidelines, speakers create structures that not only organize their own ideas but also enhance audience comprehension.

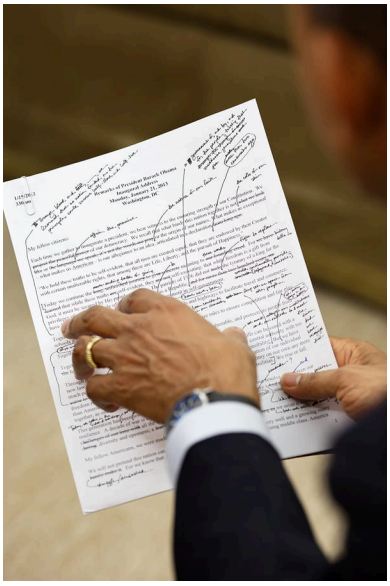


Figure 10.4.1: President Obama reviewing handwritten notes for his inauguration address, illustrating the careful organization and planning involved in crafting a speech outline. (Public Domain; Pete Souza via Wikimedia Commons)

Starting and ending with outlines, especially extended outlines with margin notes (like in Figure 10.4.1), offers significant advantages in speech preparation, academic writing, and other disciplines. Beginning with an extended outline provides a structured framework to organize ideas, test the flow between points, and ensure each supports the thesis. Ending with a condensed speaking or final outline helps maintain focus during delivery or writing.

Margin notes further enhance this process by allowing speakers and writers to include reminders, examples, or cross-references, creating a dynamic tool for refining content, planning transitions, and staying engaged with the material. Together, extended outlines and margin notes promote clarity, coherence, and effective communication across contexts.

By starting and ending with a well-constructed outline, speakers can more easily apply these five standards, ensuring that each point is clear, consistent, adequately supported, balanced, and parallel. Using extended outlines with margin notes helps maintain these principles throughout preparation and delivery, resulting in a more coherent and effective speech.

The first standard is **singularity**, which emphasizes that the thesis and each main point should express a single, clear idea.

Combining multiple ideas into one point can create confusion for both the speaker and the audience. A precise, focused statement ensures that the speech progresses in a logical and manageable way.

The second standard is **consistency**. This involves maintaining uniformity in tense, language, and definitions throughout the speech. For example, using “humanity” consistently rather than alternating between “mankind” and “humans” avoids ambiguity. Clearly defining terms and applying them consistently throughout a presentation strengthens audience understanding.

A third standard is **adequacy**. What may seem obvious to the speaker may not be obvious to the audience. To address this, speakers must provide clear definitions and ample supporting evidence drawn from credible, authoritative sources. Avoiding unsupported personal opinions ensures that the message is both persuasive and trustworthy.

The fourth standard, **uniformity**, calls for balance in the treatment of main points. Each should receive relatively equal attention in terms of supporting evidence and importance to the thesis. Imbalance, where one point is overly detailed while others are underdeveloped, can weaken the overall effectiveness of the speech.

Finally, **parallelism** strengthens clarity and cohesion by requiring that main points follow a consistent grammatical and structural pattern. For instance, phrasing all points as statements rather than mixing questions and statements creates a smoother flow and prevents audience confusion. Parallel construction makes the logic of the speech more accessible and memorable.

Ultimately, a strong outline not only organizes a speech but also guides its conclusion. The closing section should bring the message “full circle” by revisiting the thesis and preview while signaling clear closure. A decisive ending leaves no doubt in the audience’s mind that the speech has concluded, ensuring a strong final impression and a natural moment for applause.

"Smart Dust Speech" — Creating an Outline

Having examined the introduction, body, and conclusion of the smart dust speech, we can now see how all these elements work together. The next step is to create a full outline that organizes the speech from start to finish, demonstrating the complete structure in one coherent plan.

Full-Sentence Outline

Specific Purpose: To inform the audience about smart dust, including its definition, applications, and potential implications for society.
Thesis Statement: Smart dust represents a transformative technology that integrates micro-scale sensors to monitor, analyze, and interact with environments in ways that have significant military, civilian, and ethical implications.

Introduction

- Attention-Getter
  - Michael Crichton’s novel *Prey* describes swarms of nanomachines that operate autonomously, blurring the line between science fiction and reality.
- Link to Topic
  - Recent advances in microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) have made these nanodevices a scientific reality, with applications in healthcare, industry, and security.
- Reason to Listen
  - Understanding smart dust is important because it has the potential to impact everyday life, from environmental monitoring to personal privacy and public safety.
- Credibility Statement
  - Research in electrical engineering and peer-reviewed studies highlight smart dust’s emerging role across multiple sectors, demonstrating its credibility as a topic of contemporary technological relevance.
- Thesis Statement
  - Today, I will explain what smart dust is, how it functions, and the potential applications and implications it holds for military and civilian contexts.
- Preview of Main Points
  - First, I will define smart dust and describe its technical components; next, I will examine military applications; and finally, I will discuss civilian uses and ethical considerations.

Body

- Main Point 1 – Definition and Technical Components of Smart Dust
  - Smart dust consists of tiny, wireless microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) that combine sensors, processors, and communication capabilities in particles so small they can operate autonomously in diverse environments. These devices collect, process, and transmit data, allowing real-time monitoring and analysis across physical spaces.
- Warrant
  - Understanding the technical foundation of smart dust is essential because it explains how this technology can function at a scale and level of detail previously impossible, which underpins all its applications.

Transition: Now that we understand what smart dust is and how it functions, let us explore its military applications.

- Main Point 2 – Military Applications
  - Smart dust has significant potential in military contexts, including battlefield surveillance, treaty monitoring, homeland security, and the detection of weapons of mass destruction. Its small size allows discreet deployment in sensitive or inaccessible areas, providing continuous situational awareness without endangering personnel.
- Warrant
  - Recognizing military uses is important because it highlights both the strategic advantages and ethical considerations of deploying pervasive sensing technologies in high-stakes environments.

Transition: Beyond military uses, smart dust offers numerous possibilities for civilian applications that affect everyday life.

- Main Point 3 – Civilian Uses and Ethical Considerations
  - In civilian contexts, smart dust can monitor air quality, track industrial machinery, optimize energy use, and provide healthcare monitoring through wearable or environmental sensors. However, these applications raise ethical concerns, particularly regarding privacy and data security.
- Warrant
  - Considering civilian applications and ethics is crucial because these technologies will directly influence daily life, personal safety, and societal norms, making informed adoption and regulation essential.

Conclusion

- Restated Thesis
  - In summary, smart dust is a groundbreaking technology that integrates micro-scale sensors to collect and transmit data, offering transformative military and civilian applications.
- Review of Main Points
  - We first examined the definition and technical components of smart dust, then explored its military applications, and finally considered its civilian uses alongside ethical considerations.
- Concluding Device
  - As Dr. Kris Pister notes, while privacy concerns remain, the benefits of smart dust may soon revolutionize how we monitor and interact with the world. The challenge for society is to embrace these innovations responsibly, balancing technological potential with ethical responsibility.

Speaking Outline

Card 1 – Introduction

- Attention-Getter: “Michael Crichton’s *Prey* describes swarms of nanomachines, blurring sci-fi and reality.”
- Link to Topic: “MEMS technology has made nanodevices a scientific reality, used in health, industry, and security.”
- Reason to Listen: “Smart dust could affect your life, from environmental monitoring to privacy.”
- Credibility: “Research and industry reports highlight smart dust’s emerging role.”
- Thesis: “Smart dust is a transformative technology with military and civilian applications.”
- Preview: “I’ll cover: 1) what smart dust is, 2) military uses, 3) civilian uses and ethics.”

Card 2 – Main Point 1: Definition & Components

- Statement: “Smart dust consists of tiny, autonomous MEMS that sense, process, and communicate data.”
- Supporting Info: “They allow real-time monitoring in many environments.”
- Warrant: “Understanding the technical foundation shows how it can function and why it matters.”
- Transition: “Now that we know what smart dust is, let’s see military applications.”

Card 3 – Main Point 2: Military Applications

- Statement: “Smart dust enables battlefield surveillance, treaty monitoring, homeland security, and WMD detection.”
- Supporting Info: “Small size allows discreet deployment and continuous situational awareness.”
- Warrant: “Military use highlights strategic advantages and ethical considerations.”
- Transition: “Beyond military uses, smart dust has civilian applications.”

Card 4 – Main Point 3: Civilian Applications & Ethics

- Statement: “Smart dust can monitor air quality, track machinery, optimize energy, and support healthcare.”
- Supporting Info: “Raises privacy and data security concerns.”
- Warrant: “Civilian impact shows why responsible adoption is critical.”
- Transition: “Now let’s summarize and conclude.”

Card 5 – Conclusion

- Restated Thesis: “Smart dust integrates micro-scale sensors with transformative applications.”
- Review Points: “We covered definition/components, military uses, and civilian applications with ethics.”
- Concluding Device: “Dr. Kris Pister: Benefits outweigh privacy concerns. Challenge: balance innovation with responsibility.”

Key Takeaways

- Outlines are essential for maintaining logical coherence, relevance, and clarity throughout the speech.
- Evaluating an outline involves assessing the scope of content, logical relationships among points, adequacy of supporting evidence, and proportionality of main points.
- Speech preparation progresses from flexible working outlines to detailed full-sentence outlines and concise speaking outlines.
- Strong outlines adhere to principles of singularity, consistency, adequacy, uniformity, and parallelism.
- A well-structured outline enhances message clarity, supports ethical presentation, and facilitates effective delivery.

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10.5: Presentation Aids

Supporting Our Speeches With Visuals

When you give a speech, you are presenting much more than just a collection of words and ideas. Since you are speaking live, your audience members will aesthetically experience your speech through all five of their senses: hearing, vision, smell, taste, and touch. In addition to your verbal and nonverbal embodiment, presentation aids assist in amplifying your content for the audience's overall experience.

Presentation aids are the resources beyond the speech itself that a speaker uses to enhance the message conveyed to the audience. The type of presentation aids that speakers most typically make use of are **visual aids**: pictures, diagrams, charts and graphs, maps, and the like. **Audible aids** include musical excerpts, audio speech excerpts, and sound effects. A speaker may also use fragrance samples or food samples as olfactory (sense of smell) or gustatory (sense of taste) aids. Finally, presentation aids can be three-dimensional objects or they can change over a period of time, as in the case of a how-to demonstration. As you can see, you have a range of presentation aids at your disposal.

Effective presentation aids are guided by two questions:

1. How can I best represent an idea in my speech through a presentation aid?
2. When is best to introduce it to the audience?

If you're able to answer these two main questions, the audience is more likely to understand your idea more fully. Each presentation aid a speaker uses must be a direct, uncluttered example of a specific element of the speech. It is understandable that someone presenting a speech about Abraham Lincoln might want to include a photograph of him, but if there's a high probability that the audience knows what Lincoln looked like, the picture would not contribute much to the message unless, perhaps, the message was specifically about the changes in Lincoln's appearance during his time in office.

In this example, other visual artifacts may be more likely to deliver relevant information—a diagram of the interior of Ford's Theater where Lincoln was assassinated, a facsimile of the messy and much-edited Gettysburg Address, or a photograph of the Lincoln family, for example. The key is that each presentation aid must directly express an idea in your speech.

Moreover, presentation aids must be used at the time when you are presenting the specific ideas related to the aid. For example, if you are speaking about coral reefs and one of your supporting points is about the location of the world's major reefs, it would make sense to display a map of these reefs while you're talking about location. If you display it while you are explaining what coral actually is, or describing the kinds of fish that feed on a reef, the map will not serve as a useful aid—in fact, it's likely to be a distraction.

In this chapter, we will discuss some principles and strategies to help you incorporate effective presentation aids into your speech. We will begin by discussing the functions that good presentation aids fulfill. Next, we will explore some of the many types of presentation aids and how best to design and utilize them. We will also describe various media that can be used for presentation aids.

Functions of Presentation Aids

Why should you use presentation aids? If you have prepared and rehearsed your speech adequately, shouldn't a good speech with a good delivery be enough to stand on its own? While it is true that impressive presentation aids will not rescue a poor speech, it is also important to recognize that a good speech can often be made even better by the strategic use of presentation aids. Remember that your speech is an experience rather than the isolated transmission of information, so presentation aids can enhance or detract from the aesthetics.

Presentation aids can fulfill several functions:

- Improve your audience's understanding of the information you are conveying;
- Enhance audience memory and retention of the message;
- Add variety and interest to your speech; and

- Enhance your credibility as a speaker.

Let's examine each of these functions.

Improving Audience Understanding

Human communication is a complex process that often leads to misunderstandings. If you are like most people, you can easily remember incidents when you misunderstood a message or when someone else misunderstood what you said to them. Misunderstandings happen in public speaking just as they do in everyday conversations.

One reason for misunderstandings is that perception and interpretation are highly complex, individual processes (remember that communication is always cultural and contextual rather than a universal set of symbols). Most of us have seen the image in which, depending on your perception, you see either the outline of a vase or the facial profiles of two people facing each other, known as the Rubin's vase (Hasson et al, 2001). Or you may have listened to a song for years only to have a friend say, "uh, those aren't the lyrics!" These examples demonstrate how interpretation can differ, and it means that your presentations must be based on careful thought and preparation to maximize the likelihood that your listeners will understand your presentation as you intend them to.

As a speaker, one of your basic goals is to help your audience understand your message. To reduce misunderstanding, presentation aids can be used to clarify or to emphasize.

To clarify:

- Am I describing a complex process that could be represented differently?
- Am I referencing ideas that are visual or sensory in nature?

To emphasize:

- Is there an idea or aspect of the speech that needs to be underscored?

Aiding Retention and Recall

The second function that presentation aids can serve is to increase the audience's chances of remembering your speech. An article by the U.S. Department of Labor (1996) summarized research on how people learn and remember. The authors found that "83% of human learning occurs visually, and the remaining 17% through the other senses—11% through hearing, 3.5% through smell, 1% through taste, and 1.5% through touch."

For this reason, exposure to an image can serve as a memory aid to your listeners. When your graphic images deliver information effectively and when your listeners understand them clearly, audience members are likely to remember your message long after your speech is over.

An added plus of using presentation aids is that they can boost *your* retention and memory while you are speaking. Using your presentation aids while you rehearse your speech will familiarize you with the association between a given place in your speech and the presentation aid that accompanies that material.

Adding Variety and Interest

A third function of presentation aids is simply to make your speech more interesting. For example, wouldn't a speech on community gardens have a greater impact if you accompanied your remarks with pictures of such gardens? You can imagine that your audience would be even more enthralled if you had the ability to display produce for your audience live. Similarly, if you were speaking to a group of gourmet cooks about spices, you might want to provide tiny samples of spices that they could smell and taste during your speech.

Enhancing a Speaker's Credibility

The final function of a presentation aid is to increase your ethos, or credibility. A high-quality presentation will contribute to your professional image. This means that in addition to containing important information, your presentation aids must be clear, clean, uncluttered, organized, and large enough for the audience to see and interpret correctly. Misspellings and poorly designed

presentation aids can damage your credibility as a speaker. Even if you give a good speech, you run the risk of appearing unprofessional if your presentation aids are poorly executed.

In addition, make sure that you give proper credit to the source of any presentation aids that you take from other sources. Using a statistical chart or a map without proper credit will detract from your credibility, just as using a quotation in your speech without credit would. This situation will usually take place with digital aids such as PowerPoint slides. The source of a chart or the data shown in a chart form should be cited at the bottom of the slide and orally in your speech.

If you focus your efforts on producing presentation aids that contribute effectively to your meaning, that look professional, and that are handled well, your audience will most likely appreciate your efforts and pay close attention to your message. That attention will help them learn or understand your topic in a new way and will thus help the audience see you as a knowledgeable, competent, and credible speaker. With the prevalence of digital communication, the audience expectation of quality visual aids has increased.

Avoiding Common Presentation Aid Pitfalls

Using presentation aids can come with some risks. However, with a little forethought and adequate practice, you can choose presentation aids that enhance your message and boost your professional appearance in front of an audience.

One principle to keep in mind is to use only as many presentation aids as necessary to present your message or clarify a component of your idea. Too often, speakers fall into a "must have long and detailed presentational aids for the entire speech" – in these cases, the aid can overshadow or distract from the content, rather than to clarify or add emphasis. Instead, simplify as much as possible, emphasizing the information you want your audience to understand rather than overwhelming them with too much text and too many images.

Another important consideration is context. Remember to survey the literal context of your speech to decide what aid is possible – is there technology? Is there a poster stand or a white board? Are there speakers? Is there WiFi? Keep your presentation aids within the limits of the working technology available to you. Whether or not your technology works on the day of your speech, you will still have to present. As the speaker, you are responsible for arranging the things you need to make your presentation aids work as intended. Carry a roll of duct tape so you can display your poster even if the easel is gone. Find an extra chair if your table has disappeared. Test the computer setup. Have your slides on a flash drive AND send it to yourself as an attachment or post to a cloud service. Have an alternative plan prepared in case there is some glitch that prevents your computer-based presentation aids from being usable. And of course, you must know how to use the technology.

Finally, presentation aids do not "speak for themselves." When you display a visual aid, you should explain what it shows, pointing out and naming the most important features. If you use an audio aid such as a musical excerpt, you need to tell your audience what to listen for. Similarly, if you use a video clip, it is up to you as the speaker to point out the characteristics in the video that support the point you are making—but probably beforehand, so you are not speaking over the video. At the same time, a visual aid should be quickly accessible to the audience. This is where simplicity comes in. Just as in organization of a speech you would use 3-5 main points, not 20 main points, you should limit categories of information on a visual aid.

Types of Presentation Aids

Now that we've explored some basic hints for preparing presentation aids, the next step is determining what type of presentation aid is best. We'll discuss types of aids that fall into two categories: representations of data and/or representations that display a real process, idea, person, place, or thing. In other words, ask yourself: "what type of information do I think needs to be accentuated? A statistic? An image of an idea?" Once you answer, the categories below can help you determine which aid would be the best to display that type of information.

Representations of Data

If you are looking to clarify a complex piece of data or piece of evidence from your speech, you may decide that a chart, graph, or diagram is best. Charts, graphs, and diagrams help represent statistics, processes, figures, or other numeric evidence that may be otherwise difficult to comprehend if just spoken.

A **chart** is commonly defined as a graphical representation of data or a sketch representing an ordered process. Whether you create your charts or do research to find charts that already exist, it is important for them to exactly match the specific purpose

in your speech.

There are two common types of charts: statistical charts and sequence-of-steps chart.

- A **statistical chart** is a visual representation of numerical data used to organize, summarize, and compare information from a study, survey, or set of measurements. These charts help audiences understand quantitative information more easily but require explanation from the speaker to ensure accurate interpretation.
- A **sequence-of-steps chart** is a visual aid that illustrates the order of actions, stages, or events in a process. These charts help audiences follow complex procedures by showing how individual steps connect and progress from beginning to end.

A **graph** is a pictorial representation of the relationships of quantitative data using dots, lines, bars, pie slices, and the like. Graphs show how one factor (such as size, weight, number of items) varies in comparison to other items. Whereas a statistical chart may report the mean (or average) ages of individuals entering college, a graph would show how the mean age changes over time. A statistical chart may report the number of computers sold in the United States, while a graph will use bars or lines to show the breakdown of those computers by operating systems such as Windows, Macintosh, and Linux.

Public speakers can show graphs using a range of different formats. Some of those formats are specialized for various professional fields. Very complex graphs often contain too much information that is not related to the purpose of a speech. If the graph is cluttered, it becomes difficult to comprehend. If you find a graph that has useful information, ask: "do I need to represent this graph as-is or can I represent a key portion of the graph that's most relevant to my data?"

There are three types of graphs:

- **Line graphs** are designed to show trends over time. You could, for example, use a line graph to chart Enron's stock prices over time.
- **Bar graphs** are useful for showing the differences between quantities. They can be used for population demographics, fuel costs, math ability in different grades, and many other kinds of data.
- **Pie graphs** are usually depicted as circles and are designed to show proportional relationships within sets of data; in other words, they show parts of or percentages of a whole. They should be simplified as much as possible without eliminating important information.

Diagrams are visual representations that simplify a complex process. They may be drawings or sketches that outline and explain the parts of an object, process, or phenomenon that cannot be readily seen. When you introduce a diagram, you are working to label parts of a process for your audience. For example, you may decide to diagram how human communication occurs because simply describing that process would be too complex.

Charts, graphs, and diagrams can present challenges in being effective but also in being ethical. To be both ethical and effective, you need a good understanding of what statistics mean, and you need to create or use graphs that show amounts clearly. Remember that clarifying is a key goal of presentational aids, so ask: is my graph or chart making my information more or less difficult to comprehend?

Representations of Real Processes or Things

In contrast, a second set of presentational aids represents real processes, things, persons, places, or ideas. While charts and graphs simplify more complex or abstract ideas, data, or evidence, this set of presentational aids attempts to add emphasis to real, literal stuff. This includes: maps, photos, videos, audio recordings, and objects (diagrams can also fall into this category, depending on what you're mapping).

- A **map** is a visual representation of geographic information used to show locations, relationships, distances, or patterns across a specific area. Maps can help audiences better understand spatial concepts by highlighting relevant features, such as political boundaries, population trends, weather patterns, or physical landscapes. Effective maps should be simple, focused, and directly connected to the purpose of the speech.
- **Photographs and drawings** are visual aids that represent real objects, people, places, or ideas to help audiences better understand or emotionally connect with a topic. They are especially useful when a visual example can communicate details, experiences, or impacts more effectively than words alone.
- **Video or audio recordings** are multimedia presentation aids that use moving images, sound, or recorded content to enhance a speaker's message. These aids can provide examples, demonstrations, or experiences that support the speech, but they should be brief, relevant, and clearly connected to the speaker's main point.

There is one major warning to using audio and video clips during a speech: do not forget that they are supposed to be aids to your speech, not the speech itself! In addition, be sure to avoid these four mistakes that speakers often make when using audio and video clips:

- Avoid choosing clips that are too long for the overall length of the speech.
- Practice with the audio or video equipment prior to speaking. If you are unfamiliar with the equipment, you'll look foolish trying to figure out how it works. Be sure that the speakers on the computer are on and at the right volume level.
- Cue the clip to the appropriate place prior to beginning your speech, and try to avoid any advertisement interruptions (which can make the aid look unprofessional).
- The audience must be given context before the video or audio clip is played, specifically what the clip is and why it relates to the speech. At the same time, the video should not repeat what you have already said, but add to it.

Objects refer to anything you could hold up and talk about during your speech. If you're talking about the importance of not using plastic water bottles, you might hold up a plastic water bottle and a stainless-steel water bottle as examples.

Ways to Display Your Presentation Aid

Above, we've discussed why you might use a presentation aid and what aid might work best. "How do I display these?" you might be wondering. For example, if you decide that a graph would be helpful in clarifying a complex idea, you have options on how to present that graph to the audience, including presentation software or more low-tech means. We'll talk through each below.

Using Presentation Software

Presentation software and slides are a common mechanism to display information for your audience. You are likely familiar with Google Slides, but there are several others:

- Microsoft PowerPoint
- Canva
- Apple's Keynote
- Prezi
- AdobeAcrobat Presenter

Each software allows you to present professional-looking slides. For example, you can use the full range of fonts, although many of them are not appropriate for presentations because they are hard to read.

Advantages to Using Slides

- They allow visualization of concepts;
- They are easily portable and uniform;
- They can be embedded with videos and audio; and
- They are projectable and more easily visible throughout a room.

Disadvantages to Using Slides

- They're too linear and audiences aren't encouraged to see the relationship between ideas (Frommer, 2012);
- PowerPoint is too rigid in the slide-by-slide format (Tufte, 2005);
- They become overcrowded; and
- The presentational slides become the speech.

Remember that presentation software aids are a way to display what you want your audience to know—a graph, an idea, an image. Presentation software is not the only way to display these, so slides should be a purposeful choice. *What* you display is the top priority.

Before we continue, we have one note: You'll notice that "text from the speech" is not included in our list of types of presentation aids in the section above. You may decide that adding emphasis to a key word or concept from your speech is needed – and that's OK! You may even decide that providing that concept, visually, for the audience is worthwhile by writing or displaying the words,

and that's OK, too. However, remember that presentation aids are included for a reason, and it's often unnecessary to provide an entire outline of your speech's text through a presentation software like PowerPoint slides. Speakers, too often, copy and paste parts of their speech onto a PowerPoint slide and think, "There! A presentation aid!" Ask: *what purpose does this text serve for my audience?* If your answer doesn't result in clarifying, emphasizing, or retaining, it's likely not needed.

Creating Quality Slide Shows

Slides should show the principles of good design, which include unity, emphasis or focal point, scale and proportion, balance, and rhythm (Lauer & Pentak, 2000). Presenters should also pay attention to tone and usability.



Figure 10.5.1: Audience members participate in an Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebration, illustrating how a single, clear photograph can reinforce a presentation's message and tone. (CC0 1.0; Delaney Jensen via Wikimedia Commons)

With those principles in mind, here are some tips for creating and then using presentation software.

- **Unity and Consistency**: Use a single (readable) sans serif font, single background, and unified animations for your visuals so that they look like a unified set. Each slide should have one message, photo, or graphic.
- **Emphasis, Focal Point, and Visibility**: All information should be large enough—at least 24-point font— for audiences. To guarantee visibility, follow the 7X7 rule: no more than seven horizontal lines of text (including the heading) and the longest line should not exceed seven words. Finally, provide higher contrast between text and slides.
- **Tone**: Fonts, color, clip art, photographs, and templates all contribute to tone, which is the attitude being conveyed in the slides. Make sure the tone of the presentation software matches the overall aesthetic tone of the speech.
- **Scale and Proportion**: Use numbers to communicate a sequence. If bullet points are used, the text should be short. Adjust graphs or visuals on the slide, avoiding small or multiple visuals on the same image.
- **Balance and Rhythm**: Work to create symmetry and balance between each slide. When presenting, think about what's being displayed on the slide to the audience and when. If you aren't using it, insert a black screen between images.
- **Usability**: With any image or graphic, make sure to include "alt text"—or a description of what the image is. Proving alt text is helpful for users with screen readers.

We recommend that you survey your university's resources for assistance with creating quality and accessible presentation slides.

Low-Tech Presentation Aids

In addition to presentation slides, there are other "low-tech" ways to display. Instead of providing a diagram on PowerPoint, you may decide that drawing it live is more beneficial. Below, we talk through a few additional means to display your information to the audience.

Dry-Erase Board

If you use a chalkboard or dry-erase board, what you display should still be thought-out, rehearsed, and clearly professional. You run the risk of appearing less prepared, but numerous speakers do utilize chalk and dry-erase boards effectively. Typically, these speakers use the chalk or dry-erase board for interactive components of a speech. For example, maybe you're giving a speech in front of a group of executives. Chalk or dry-erase boards are very useful when you want to visually show information that you are receiving from your audience. If you ever use a chalk or dry-erase board, follow these five simple rules:

- Write large enough so that everyone in the room can see;
- Print legibly (i.e., don't write in cursive script);
- Write short phrases (i.e., don't take time to write complete sentences);
- Never turn your back to the audience while you're talking; and
- Be sure you have markers that will not go dry, and clean the board afterward.

Flipchart

A flipchart is useful for situations when you want to save what you have written for future reference or to distribute to the audience after the presentation. As with whiteboards, you will need good markers and readable handwriting, as well as a strong easel to keep the flipchart upright.

Posters

Posters often represent a key graph, idea, or visualization. For a poster, you likely want to display one key piece of information at one key part of your presentation. Otherwise, posters are probably not the best way to approach presentation aids in a speech. There are problems with visibility as well as portability. Avoid producing a presentation aid that looks like you simply cut pictures out of magazines and pasted them on.

Handouts

Handouts are appropriate for delivering information that audience members can take away with them. As we will see, handouts require a great deal of management if they are to contribute to your credibility as a speaker.

First, make sure the handout is worth the trouble of making, copying, and distributing it. Does the audience really need the handout? Second, make sure to bring enough copies of the handout for each audience member to get one. Having to share or look on with one's neighbor does not contribute to a professional image. Third, consider timing. We recommend providing the handout at the conclusion of your speech.

Reminders for Integrating Presentation Aids

Regardless of what presentation aid you choose—a photo, chart, map— and the medium that you'll display it—a handout, slide deck, audio device— all presentation aids require rehearsal. While we've included tips on integrating presentation aids in your speech throughout this chapter, use the following list of strategies to integrate your aid into the speech.

- Gather all citation information and provide it both visually and orally to your audience.
- In your speaking notes, mark where you will integrate the presentation aid so that you don't forget about it due to nervousness.
- Determine where the presentation aid will be when it's not being displayed.
- For a PowerPoint presentation, include blank/black slides that are used when your visual aid isn't in use.
- Store other objects in non-distracting locations.
- Rehearse your transitions into and out of the presentation aid.

The Importance of Visual Aids For Your Audience

When you're an audience member, it's important to reflect on the assumptions that we hold about the speaker. Are we judging a speaker based on our own assumptions of what's normal?

Similarly, when you're making decisions about presentation aids as a speaker, it's important to be reflexive about who is in the audience. Are you making decisions about presentation aids based on our own assumptions about what's normal and who's normal? Are you assuming, for example, that all audience members are able-bodied and able to visually and audibly experience your presentation aid?

Creating an accessible experience for audience members must be a priority. For example, you may want to avoid red and green colors on your visual aids as they're not perceivable to all audience members. While constructing presentation software of slides, make sure you include alt-text for images, especially if you provide the slides to the presentation. These are for audience members who may be sight-impaired. Check out guidelines for the presentation software you're using on how to embed alt-text. Additionally, be weary of smells that may be intense or irritate audience members. Overall, be careful not to assume that audience members also fit the mythical norm as you construct your presentation aid.



Figure 10.5.2: It is important to provide an accessible experience for your audience, so avoid colors such as red and green, which may not be perceivable to all audience members. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Eyoungstrom via Wikimedia Commons)

Key Takeaways

- Presentation aids enhance, but do not replace, a speech. Visuals, audio, objects, and other aids should support the speaker's message rather than become the focus of the presentation.
- Effective presentation aids must be relevant and well-timed. A presentation aid should directly connect to a specific idea in the speech and be shown at the moment when it helps the audience understand that idea.
- Presentation aids improve understanding, memory, engagement, and credibility. Well-designed visuals can clarify complex information, help audiences remember key points, make speeches more interesting, and create a more professional image for the speaker.
- Simple and purposeful design is more effective than overloaded visuals. Speakers should avoid cluttered slides, excessive text, and unnecessary images; instead, visuals should be clear, organized, readable, and focused on the main message.
- Accessibility and preparation are essential when using presentation aids. Speakers should consider diverse audience needs, provide accessible materials (such as alt text), cite sources, test technology, and rehearse how they will integrate aids into the speech.

Attributions

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10.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

Public speaking is a multifaceted process that requires attention to both content and structure. At its foundation, every speech is composed of an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, each serving a distinct and essential purpose. The introduction functions as the gateway, capturing attention, establishing credibility, and signaling the speech's purpose. By employing strategies that are relevant, ethically sound, and audience-centered, speakers create a cognitive and emotional framework that prepares listeners to receive and process the message effectively.

The body of the speech constitutes the substantive core of the presentation, where main ideas are developed, analyzed, and supported with evidence. Careful attention to organizational patterns, such as topical, chronological, causal, or problem-solution, ensures logical progression and enhances audience comprehension. Principles of unity, distinction, balance, and parallel structure guide the development of main points, while transitions, internal previews, summaries, and signposts facilitate navigation through complex material. Collectively, these strategies transform raw information into coherent, persuasive communication.

Conclusions serve to reinforce the speech's central message and leave a lasting impression. A well-crafted conclusion signals closure, restates the thesis, reviews main points, and utilizes an appropriate concluding device to ensure audience retention. The selection of concluding devices should align with the speech's purpose, whether informative, persuasive, or entertaining. By linking the conclusion to the introduction and body, speakers create a cohesive and memorable communicative experience.

Outlines are critical tools for organizing and refining speeches. Working, full-sentence, and speaking outlines each serve distinct functions, enabling speakers to evaluate scope, logical flow, evidence adequacy, and proportionality. Outlines provide a framework that enhances clarity, coherence, and ethical delivery, ensuring that each element of the speech aligns with the central thesis and the audience's needs.

The integration of these components demonstrates the interdependent nature of public speaking. The introduction sets the stage, the body develops the argument, the conclusion consolidates understanding, and the outline ensures logical coherence and strategic planning. Each element reinforces the others, creating a speech that is organized, persuasive, and audience-centered.

Ultimately, mastery of these foundational skills equips speakers to communicate ideas with clarity, credibility, and impact. Effective public speaking is not merely a matter of content knowledge but of intentional design, audience awareness, and strategic delivery. By applying the principles outlined in this chapter, speakers can craft presentations that are memorable, engaging, and rhetorically effective, enhancing their ability to inform, persuade, and inspire diverse audiences.

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10.8: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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10.8.1: Exercises

10.1: Speech Introductions

1. Students write a 1–2 minute introduction for a short 5-minute speech. Then, using a timer, they practice delivering it, ensuring it falls within the 10–15% guideline. Afterward, they reflect: Did the introduction feel rushed, too long, or just right?
2. Provide students with a sample introduction (or let them use their own). Students will highlight or label each element: attention-getter, purpose, credibility, reason to listen, and preview of main ideas.
3. Students select a topic and brainstorm three different attention-getting strategies from the list provided (e.g., quote, anecdote, startling fact, rhetorical question, humor). Then, they will discuss which would be most effective for their audience and why.

10.2: The Body of a Speech

1. Students choose a topic and write a specific purpose statement. Then, they brainstorm potential content and condense it into 2–3 main points following the guidelines of unity, separation, balance, parallel structure, and logical flow. Students explain their reasoning for the grouping and sequence of points.
2. Provide students with a list of speech topics. Students will identify the most appropriate organizational pattern for each topic (e.g., chronological, causal, problem-cause-solution, topical). Then, they will briefly outline their main points according to that pattern.
3. Students write a short body for a speech (1–2 minutes) with at least three main points. They must include at least one transition, internal preview, internal summary, and signpost. Afterward, they practice delivering it and self-assess how smoothly the points connect.

10.3: Speech Conclusions

1. Students take a speech topic they've already outlined or written. They will write a complete conclusion that includes: restated thesis, review of main points, and one appropriate concluding device (challenge, quotation, visualization, etc.) Then, share in pairs and evaluate whether the conclusion clearly signals the end and reinforces the message.
2. Provide students with a list of speech purposes (informative, persuasive, motivational) and a list of concluding devices. They will match the device to the purpose and justify why it works best in that context. Example: Persuasive speech → Call-to-action; Informative speech → Summary or visualization.
3. Give students a weak or awkward sample conclusion (e.g., "So yeah, that's it. Thanks."). Students will rewrite it using the three-step structure (restated thesis, main points, concluding device) and explain how their version improves clarity, recall, and audience impact.

10.4: Organizing and Outlining

1. Take a chosen topic and create a full-sentence outline including: specific purpose, thesis statement, introduction (attention-getter, link, reason to listen, credibility, preview), three main points with supporting evidence and transitions, and conclusion (restated thesis, review, concluding device).
2. Provide students with 5 sample topics. They will decide which organizational pattern fits best (categorical, chronological, causal, problem-solution, comparison-contrast, etc.) and justify the choice. Example: "Touring a city museum" → spatial pattern; "History of jazz music" → chronological.
3. Provide a sample outline with uneven main points (one point has 8 supporting details, another only 1). They will revise the outline to balance supporting evidence across points while maintaining relevance and connection to the thesis. Discuss why balance improves audience understanding and retention.

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10.8.2: Discussion Questions

10.1: Speech Introductions

1. Why do you think introductions, despite taking only 10–15% of a speech, are so critical to audience engagement? Can a weak introduction ruin a strong speech?
2. How do competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill contribute differently to a speaker's credibility? Which do you think is most important for engaging an audience in a classroom versus a public forum?
3. Consider your own experiences as an audience member: which types of attention-getters have captured your interest most effectively, and why? How might this influence how you craft your own introductions?

10.2: The Body of a Speech

1. Why is it important to limit short speeches to 2–3 main points? How does this impact audience comprehension and retention?
2. How do transitions, internal previews, internal summaries, and signposts differ in function? Can you think of a time you were lost in a presentation that lacked these cues?
3. Consider the different organizational patterns (chronological, causal, problem-solution, topical, etc.). Which do you think is most versatile for classroom speeches, and why? Can you identify patterns in speeches you've watched or attended?

10.3: Speech Conclusions

1. Why is the conclusion often the most memorable part of a speech? How does the serial position effect explain this?
2. How do different concluding devices shape the audience's final impression? Can you think of a time a speech ended in a way that inspired or frustrated you?
3. How should the type of speech (informative vs. persuasive) influence the choice of concluding device? Can a single speech effectively combine multiple devices?

10.4: Organizing and Outlining

1. How does creating a full-sentence outline improve both speaker preparation and audience comprehension compared to a list of key words or ideas?
2. Why is it important to test the scope of each main point against the thesis? What happens if a point is interesting but irrelevant?
3. How do the principles of singularity, consistency, adequacy, uniformity, and parallelism contribute to a coherent and persuasive speech? Can you think of a speech you've heard that violated one of these principles?

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11: RESEARCH

Overview

The word 'research' can evoke some very divisive responses among students. Some love it, while others would rather do anything besides having to spend hours perusing published studies to validate and substantiate their work. And while most agree that there are rewards to be gained from learning about a subject through investigative research, the process of leafing through journals and articles for information can be cumbersome and labor-intensive.

In communication studies, we define **research** as a scholarly investigation into a topic to discover, revise, or report facts, theories, and applications. Speakers who enjoy doing research might fancy themselves as detectives, searching for quality information to make their presentations pop and have a meaningful influence on their audience. Other people find research to be tedious but necessary for their presentations, as well as for themselves to sound trustworthy and credible. Then some deem research to be superfluous and completely unnecessary for the speech to be interesting and effective. Whichever category you may fall into, one thing is for certain: research is here to stay.

In fact, the impact of research has been so profound, across such a wide array of disciplines ranging from STEM to Automotive Design, to even the Fine Arts, that it is divided into two separate categories. These categories are quantitative research and qualitative research. **Quantitative research** is focused on numbers and measurable data, while **qualitative research** is more about exploring feelings, experiences, and meanings. Research forms the backbone for innovation and technological growth. It is thanks to groundbreaking studies that we have enjoyed advancements in science, technology, and other societal amenities. This research often aims to answer specific questions related to human interaction, media influence, interpersonal dynamics, organizational communication, public discourse, and more.

There are numerous types of research in communication studies. Depending on where this research will be applied.

Different Types of Research

1. **Theoretical Research**: This involves developing or refining theories about communication processes, such as how messages are constructed, transmitted, and received across various media (face-to-face, mass media, digital platforms).
2. **Empirical Research**: Empirical research collects and analyzes data to observe real-world communication phenomena. This can be done through qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups, ethnography) or quantitative methods (surveys, experiments, statistical analysis).
3. **Applied Research**: This type of research seeks to address real-world problems or challenges within communication, such as improving public relations strategies, media literacy, or understanding the impact of digital communication tools on society.
4. **Critical Research**: This approach critiques power structures, social inequalities, and how communication reinforces or challenges societal norms. It's often associated with perspectives like feminist theory, postcolonialism, or critical race theory in communication.
5. **Interdisciplinary Nature**: Communication research often draws from and contributes to various fields like sociology, psychology, linguistics, political science, and cultural studies, reflecting the interconnectedness of human communication with broader social processes.

Research in communication studies serves to deepen our understanding of how people interact with each other, the media, and the world around them, and it informs everything from media policies to advertising practices, educational methods, and interpersonal communication strategies.

Chapter Goals

- Explain why research is fun and useful.
- Differentiate between primary and secondary research.
- Identify appropriate nonacademic sources (e.g., books, special-interest periodicals, newspapers, blogs, and websites).
- Identify appropriate academic sources (e.g., scholarly books, scholarly articles, computerized databases, and scholarly information on the web).
- Explain the steps for citing sources within a speech.
- Understand how to use sources ethically in a speech.
- Explain ways to avoid plagiarism.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- APA (American Psychological Association)
- Applications
- Applied Research
- Critical Research
- Discovering Research
- Empirical Research
- Encyclopedia
- Fact
- Generalizability
- General-Interest Periodicals
- Interdisciplinary Nature
- Interview
- Mixed-Methods Approach
- MLA (Modern Language Association)
- Online-Only Library
- Peer-Reviewed Citations
- Physical Library
- Physical and Electronic Library
- Popular Press Information Sources
- Primary Research
- Qualitative Research
- Quantitative Research
- Research
- Reporting Research
- Revising Research
- Secondary Research
- Special-Interest Periodicals
- Survey
- Theoretical Research
- Theories

11.1: What Is Research?

11.2: Developing a Research Strategy

11.3: Quantitative and Qualitative Research

11.4: Citing Sources
11.5: Chapter Wrap-Up
11.6: References
11.7: Teacher Resources
11.7.1: Exercises
11.7.2: Discussion Questions

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11.1: What Is Research?

Methods of Research

Research isn't always simple, but it can be one of the most rewarding parts of learning. At its core, research is really about curiosity, asking questions, and then finding trustworthy answers. Think about it: if you've ever wondered how to stand out in a job interview or what it takes to become a NASCAR driver, astronaut, marine biologist, or professor, research is what helps you figure it out. One of the best things about research is the way it can introduce you to new ideas and perspectives. As you search, read, and evaluate information, you often come across facts or viewpoints you never expected. This process can make learning more engaging and broaden your view of the world.

Research can also inspire you to try new things. Maybe you're interested in developing a new invention to help cancer patients, writing a screenplay, composing music, or developing a method to complete tax forms more quickly. Research is often the first step toward finding resources and figuring out how to get started.

Yes, research takes effort and time, but it's also a pathway to discovery, creativity, and growth. The key is to find the best techniques that suit your personal style.



Figure 11.1.1: A student sleeps at their desk after a tiring evening of research. Research can be fun or exhausting, depending on the techniques one uses. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Egor Rukavitsin via Wikimedia Commons)

There are three distinct parts of research: discovering, revising, and reporting. The **Discovering** type of research is when people set out to conduct one particular type of study and end up finding something completely new. For example, in 1928, Alexander Fleming accidentally discovered the first antibiotic, penicillin. Before this discovery, there were no antibiotics, and simple infections killed people regularly. In this case, Fleming conducted research and discovered something not known to scientists before that time.

The **Revising** type of research occurs when people revise existing facts, theories, and applications. The bulk of the work of modern scientists is not really in discovering new things, but rather in trying to improve older discoveries. For example, to improve upon the work of Fleming's first antibiotic, a group of Croatian researchers created azithromycin. Today, azithromycin is licensed by Pfizer Inc. under the name Zithromax. In essence, the Croatian scientists built on the work of Fleming and ultimately improved our ability to treat infectious diseases. Today, azithromycin is one of the most prescribed antibiotics in the world.

The last part of the research is called the **reporting** function of research. This is the phase when you accumulate information about a topic and report that information to others. For example, in the previous two paragraphs, we conducted research on the history of antibiotics and provided you with that information. We did not discover anything, nor did we revise anything; we are just

reporting the research.

In addition to the three functions of research, there are also three results that researchers strive toward: facts, theories, and applications. First, a **fact** is a truth that is arrived at through the scientific process. For example, in the world of psychology, it is a fact that the human brain influences human behavior. Centuries ago, people believed that human behavior was a result of various combinations of black and yellow bile running through our bodies. However, research failed to find support for this idea, whereas research increasingly found support for the connection between the brain and behavior. Facts are difficult to attain—it can take generations of research before a theory gains acceptance as a scientific fact.

Second, researchers research to understand, contradict, or support **theories**. A theory is a proposed explanation for a phenomenon that can be tested scientifically. Scientists work with theories for a very long time, testing them under a variety of conditions, attempting to replicate earlier findings or to identify conditions under which earlier findings do not hold. For example, one theory that often surprises people is the universal theory of gravity. Many people believe that our understanding of gravity is set in stone, and much of physics relies on the assumption that gravity exists, but gravity is not a fact. The fact that the theory of gravity explains is that if I hold my keys out and let go, they will fall to the floor. Physicists are still debating how gravity actually functions and speculating about other explanations for why my keys will fall to the floor. So from a researcher's perspective, very few things are scientific facts.

Lastly, researchers often look for new **applications** for something that already exists. For example, botulism was, at one point, a dreaded bacterium that plagued the US food supply and led to many deaths. In the 1980s, an ophthalmologist named Allan Scott started using a version of botulism to treat muscle spasms in a drug called onabotulinumtoxinA—better known by the brand name Botox (Williamson, 2011). Richard Clark, a plastic surgeon, reported in a 1989 article that the drug also had the side effect of decreasing wrinkles (Clark & Berris, 1989). From deadly bacteria to medical cures to one of the most commonly used cosmetic drugs in the world, the history of Botox has been a constant stream of new applications.

Types of Research

Research generally falls into one of two categories: primary and secondary. **Primary research** is carried out to discover or revise facts, theories, and applications, and is reported by the person conducting the research. Primary research can be considered an active form of research because the researcher is actually conducting the research for the purpose of creating new knowledge. For your speech, you may utilize two basic categories of primary research: surveys and interviews. **Secondary research** is carried out to discover or revise facts, theories, and applications—similar to primary research—but it is reported by someone not involved in conducting the actual research. Most of what we consider "research" falls into the category of secondary research.

Primary Research

Once a researcher sets out to revise facts, theories, and applications, they must determine a method in which to do this. There are a few methods for this process; one of these methods is to conduct surveys, and another is to conduct interviews.

Surveys

The first type of primary research you might conduct is a survey. A **survey** is a collection of facts, figures, or opinions gathered from participants used to indicate how everyone within a target group may respond. Maybe you're going to be speaking before a board of education about its plans to build a new library, so you create a survey and distribute it to all your neighbors seeking their feedback on the project. During your speech, you could then discuss your survey and the results you found.

Depending on the amount of time you have and the funding available, there are several different ways you could survey people. The most expensive method of surveying is sending surveys through the mail. This method has proven to be less than ideal, due to it not being cost-effective, as it garners a less than 20% return rate.

More cost-effective methods have been conducting online surveys or approaching people face-to-face and asking them to participate. Internet surveying can be very useful and cheap, but there is still the same problem that mail surveys have, which is getting people to fill out your survey. Face-to-face surveying, on the other hand, is time-consuming but generally results in a higher number of completed surveys.

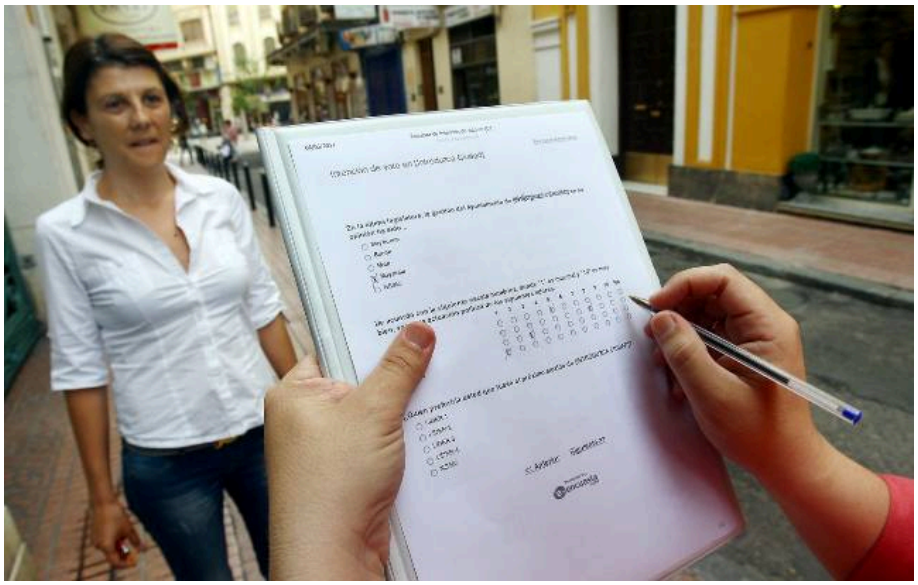


Figure 11.1.2: A researcher conducts a face-to-face survey. Face-to-face surveying, though time-consuming, generally yields a higher number of completed surveys than other forms of surveying. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Piryelgamer via Wikimedia Commons)

Ultimately, when determining whether you should conduct a survey, Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, and McCroskey suggest that you ask yourself four basic questions (Wrench et al., 2008). First, "Do you know what you want to ask?" Surveys, by their very nature, are concrete—once you've handed it to one person, you need to hand out the same form to every person to be able to compare results. If you're not sure what questions need to be asked, then a survey is not appropriate. Second, "Do you really need to collect data?" Often, you can find information in textbooks, scholarly articles, magazines, and other places. If the information already exists, then why are you duplicating it? Third, "Do your participants know the information you want to find out, or if they do know, will they tell you?" One of the biggest mistakes novice survey researchers make is to ask questions that their participants can't or won't answer. Asking a young child for his or her parents' gross income doesn't make sense, but then neither does asking an adult how many times they've been to see a physician in the past ten years. The flip side to this question is, "Will your participants tell you?" If the information could be potentially damaging, people are more likely to either lie on a survey or leave the question blank.

The last question is, "Is your goal generalizable?" **Generalizability** occurs when we attempt to survey a small number of people in the hopes of representing a much larger group of people. For example, maybe you want to find out how people in your community feel about a new swimming pool. The whole community may contain one thousand families, but it would be impractical to try to survey all those families, so you decide to survey two hundred families instead. The ultimate question for researchers is whether those two hundred families can be generalized to the one thousand families. The number may be large enough (as opposed to surveying, say, twenty families), but if the two hundred families you survey only represent the rich part of town, then your sample (the two hundred families) is not generalizable to the entire population (one thousand families).

Interviews

The second type of primary research you might conduct is an interview. An **interview** is a conversation in which the interviewer asks a series of questions aimed at learning facts, figures, or opinions from one or more respondents. As with a survey, an interviewer generally has a list of prepared questions to ask, but unlike a survey, an interview allows for follow-up questions that can aid in understanding why a respondent gave a certain answer. Sometimes interviews are conducted on a one-on-one basis, but other times interviews are conducted with a larger group, which is commonly referred to as a focus group.

One-on-one interviews enable an interviewer to receive information about a given topic with little or no interference from others. Focus groups are good for eliciting information, but they are also good for seeing how groups of people interact and perceive topics. Often, information that is elicited in a one-on-one interview is different from the information gained from a group of people interacting.

If you're preparing for a speech on implementing project management skills for student organizations, you may want to interview a handful of student organization leaders for their input. You may also want to get a group of students who have led successful projects for their student organizations and see what they did right. You could also get a group of students who

have had bad project outcomes and try to understand what went wrong. Ultimately, you could use all this information not only to help you understand the needs of student organizations concerning project management but also to provide support for the recommendations you make during your speech.

Secondary Research

If you've ever written a paper for one of your classes and had to cite sources, then you've conducted secondary research. Secondary research is when you report the results of someone else's primary research. If you read an academic article about an experiment that a group of researchers conducted and then tell your audience about that study, you are delivering information secondhand to your audience. You, as the speaker, did not conduct the study, so you are reporting what someone else has written.

One place where secondary research can get people into trouble is when they attempt to use someone else's secondary research. Let's say you are writing a paper about the impact of good public relations and marketing on a business, and you find a book titled *Unleashing the Power of PR: A Contrarian's Guide to Marketing and Communication* by Mark Weiner. In the book, Mark Weiner cites research conducted by the investment firm Veronis Suhler Stevenson Partners (Weiner, 2006). It might be tempting for you to leave out Weiner's book and directly cite the Veronis Suhler Stevenson Partners' research instead. While this may be easier, it's not exactly ethical. Mark Weiner spent time conducting research and locating primary research; if you steal one of Mark Weiner's sources, it's as though you are stealing part of the work he's done. Your secondary research should still be *your* research. If you haven't actually seen the original study (Veronis Suhler Stevenson Partners' study), you don't want to give your audience the impression that you have. An exception to this rule is if you are citing a translation of something originally written in a foreign language—and in that case, it is necessary to mention that you're using a translation and not the original.

Aside from the ethics of telling your audience where you got your information, it's important to be aware that published sources sometimes make mistakes when citing information, so you could find yourself incorrectly providing information based on a mistake in Weiner's book. Think of it like the old game of "Telephone," in which you tell one person a phrase, that person turns to the next person and repeats the phrase, and by the time thirty people have completed the process, the final phrase doesn't remotely resemble the original. When people pass information along without verifying it themselves, there is always an increased likelihood of error.

Key Takeaways

- Research is a fascinating and fun process because it allows us to find answers to questions, it exposes us to new ideas, and it can lead us to pursue new activities.
- Primary and secondary sources are quite common in research literature. Primary research is where the author has conducted the research themselves, and secondary research is when an author reports on research conducted by others.
- Research has three main functions: discovering new knowledge, revising existing knowledge, and reporting information. Each contributes differently to scientific and practical understanding.
- The outcomes of research include facts (established truths), theories (testable explanations), and applications (practical uses of knowledge), which often evolve through continuous study and innovation.
- Research can be primary (conducted firsthand through methods like surveys and interviews) or secondary (reported by others), and the choice of method depends on goals, resources, and the type of data needed.

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11.2: Developing a Research Strategy

Budgeting Your Time

In the previous section, we discussed what research was and the difference between primary and secondary research. In this section, we are going to explore how to develop a research strategy. Think of a research strategy as your personal map. The end destination is the actual speech, and along the way, there are various steps you need to complete to reach your destination: the speech. Once you get your speech assignment, the more you plan out the steps before presentation day, the smoother the whole process will be. In the rest of this section, we are going to discuss time management, determining your research needs, finding your sources, and evaluating your sources.

Allotting Time For The Project

First and foremost, when starting a new project, no matter how big or small, it is important to seriously consider how much time that project is going to take. To help us discuss the issue of time about preparing your speech, we're going to examine what the Project Management Institute refers to as the project life cycle, or "the phases that connect the beginning of a project to its end" (Project Management Institute, 2004). Often in a survey communication class, the time you have is fairly concrete. You may have two or three weeks between speeches in a semester course or one to two weeks in a quarter course. In either case, from the moment your instructor gives you the assigned speech, the proverbial clock is ticking. With each passing day, you are losing precious time in your speech preparation process. Now, we realize that as a college student, you probably have many things vying for your time in life: school, family, jobs, friends, or dating partners. For this reason, you need to really think through how much time it's going to take you to complete your preparation in terms of both research and speech preparation.



Figure 11.2.1: A calendar for May 2026 shows the 22nd circled in red. It is important to allot time to research and to set deadlines to ensure that tasks are completed on time. Image generated using the prompt "A calendar for May 2026 with the date 22 circled in red." (Public Domain; OpenAI via ChatGPT)

Research Time

The first step that takes a good chunk of your time is researching your speech. Whether you are conducting primary research or relying on secondary research sources, you're going to be spending a significant amount of time researching.

As Howard and Taggart point out in their book *Research Matters*, research is not just a one-and-done task (Howard & Taggart, 2010). As you develop your speech, you may realize that you want to address a question or issue that didn't occur to you during your first round of research, or that you're missing a key piece of information to support one of your points. For these reasons, it's

always wise to allow extra time for targeted research later in your schedule.

You also need to take into account the possibility of meeting with a research librarian. Although research librarians have many useful tips and tricks, they have schedules just like anyone else. If you know you are going to need to speak with a librarian, try to set up an appointment ahead of time for the date when you think you'll have your questions organized and be ready to meet.

A good rule of thumb is to devote no more than one-third of your speech preparation time to research (e.g., if you have three weeks before your speech date, your research should be done by the end of the first week). If you are not careful, you could easily end up spending all your time on research and waiting until the last minute to actually prepare your speech, which is highly inadvisable.



Figure 11.2.2: A man takes notes while researching a topic online. Doing research for a speech can make it convincing and transformative for the audience, not to mention increasing the speaker's credibility in the eyes of their audience. (CC0 1.0; Flickr via Wikimedia Commons)

Speech Preparation Time

The second task in speech preparation is to sit down and actually develop your speech. During this time period, you will use the information you collected during your research to fully flesh out your ideas into a complete speech. You may be making arguments using the research or creating visual aids. Whatever you need to complete during this time period, you need to give yourself ample time to actually prepare your speech. One common rule of thumb is one day of speech preparation per one minute of actual speaking time.

By allowing yourself enough time to prepare your speech, you're also buffering yourself against a variety of things that can go wrong both in life and with your speech. Let's face it, life happens. Often, events completely outside our control happen, and these events could negatively impact our ability to prepare a good speech. When you give yourself a little time buffer, you're already insulated from the possible negative effects on your speech if something goes wrong.

The last part of speech preparation is practice. Although some try to say that practice makes perfect, we realize that perfection is never realistic because no one is perfect. We prefer this mantra: "Practice makes permanent."

And by "practice," we mean actual rehearsals in which you deliver your speech out loud. Speakers who only script out their speeches or only think through them often forget their thoughts when they stand in front of an audience. Research has shown that when individuals practice, their speech performance in front of an audience is more closely aligned with their practice than that of people who just think about their speeches. In essence, you need to allow yourself to become comfortable not only with the text of the speech but also with the nonverbal delivery of the speech, so giving yourself plenty of speech preparation time also gives you more practice time. We will discuss speech development and practice further in other chapters.

Determining Your Needs

When starting your research, you want to start by asking yourself what you think you need. The first thing you'll want to have is a good idea about what your topic is, before randomly looking at information in a library or online. Your instructor may provide some very specific guidance for the type of information they want to see in your speech, so that's a good place to start determining your basic needs.

What Do You Think You'll Need

Once you have a general idea of your basic needs, you can start to ask yourself a series of simple questions:

- What do I, personally, know about my topic?
- Do I have any clear gaps in my knowledge of my topic?
- Do I need to conduct primary research for my speech?
- What type of secondary research do I need?
  - Do I need research related to facts?
  - Do I need research related to theories?
  - Do I need research related to applications?

The clearer you are about the type of research you need at the onset of the research process, the easier it will be to locate specific information.

Finding Resources

Once you have a general idea about the basic needs you have for your research, it's time to start tracking down your secondary sources. We now live in a world that is flooded with information. Decades ago, authors of books and articles would have to physically go to a library and search through a physical card catalog to find books. If you wanted to research a topic in magazine or journal articles, you had to look up key terms in a giant book, printed annually, known as an index of periodicals. Researchers could literally spend hours in the library and find just one or two sources that applied to their topic.

Today, on the other hand, information is quite literally at our fingertips. Not only is information generally more accessible, but it is also considerably easier to access. In fact, we have the opposite problem to that of decades ago—we have too much information at our fingertips. In addition, we now have to be more skeptical about where that information is coming from. In this section, we'll discuss how to find information in both nonacademic and academic sources.

Nonacademic Information Sources

Nonacademic information sources are sometimes also called **popular press information sources**; their primary purpose is to be read by the general public. Most nonacademic information sources are written at a sixth- to eighth-grade reading level, so they are very accessible. Although the information often contained in these sources is quite limited, the advantage of using nonacademic sources is that they appeal to a broad, general audience.

Books

The first source for finding secondary information is books. This is good news, because unless your topic is very cutting-edge, chances are someone has written a book about your topic at some point in history. Additionally, in today's world, books are ubiquitous and are easier than ever to find in various formats.

Historically, the original purpose of libraries was to house manuscripts that were copied by hand and stored in library collections. After Gutenberg created the printing press, we could mass-produce writing, and the manuscript gave way to the printed book. In today's modern era, we are seeing another change where printed manuscripts are now giving way, to some extent, to the electronic manuscript. Amazon.com's Kindle, Barnes & Noble's Nook, Apple's iPad, and Sony's e-Ink-based readers are examples of the new hardware enabling people to take entire libraries of information with them wherever they go. We can now carry the amount of information that used to be housed in the greatest historic libraries, literally in the palms of our hands.

In today's world, there are three basic types of libraries you should be aware of: physical library, physical/electronic library, and e-online library. The **physical library** is a brick-and-mortar library that you can physically walk into and explore physical copies of books and other reading and viewing materials. Many small community or county library collections are available only if you physically go into the library and check out a book. Most professors highly recommend that their students do this at some point. Libraries today generally model the US Library of Congress's card catalog system. As such, most library layouts are similar. This familiar layout makes it much easier to find information if you are using multiple libraries. Furthermore, because the Library of Congress catalogs information by type, if you find one book that is useful for you, likely that the surrounding books on the same shelf will also be useful. When people don't take the time to physically browse in a library, they often miss out on some great information.

The second type of library is a **Physical and Electronic Library** that has both physical and electronic components. Most college and university libraries have both the physical stacks (where the books are located) and electronic databases containing e-books. The two largest e-book databases are eBookCentral and EBSCO. Although these library collections are generally cost-prohibitive for an individual, more and more academic institutions are subscribing to them. Some libraries are also making portions of their collections available online for free: Harvard University's Digital Collections, New York Public Library's E-book Collection, The British Library and the US Library of Congress.



Figure 11.2.3: Students conducting online research at a physical library. Most college and university libraries have both physical stacks and electronic databases containing e-books. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Wikimedia Foundation Staff and Contractors via Wikimedia Commons)

One of the greatest advantages of using libraries for finding books is that you can search not only their books but also a wide network of other academic institutions' books as well. Furthermore, in today's world, we have at our fingertips access to an incredibly abundant online card catalog that we use almost every day—and it wasn't created for libraries at all. Amazon.com can be a great source for finding books that may apply to your topic, and the best part is, you don't actually need to purchase the book if you use your library, because your library may actually own a copy of a book you find on a bookseller site. You can pick a topic and then search for that topic on a bookseller's site. If you find a book that you think may be appropriate, plug that book's title into your school's electronic library catalog. If your library owns the book, you can go to the library and pick it up today.

If your library doesn't own it, do you still have an option other than buying the book? Yes: interlibrary loans. An interlibrary loan is a process where librarians can search other libraries to locate the book a researcher is trying to find. If another library has that book, then the library asks to borrow it for a short period of time. Depending on how easy a book is to find, your library could receive it in a couple of days or a couple of weeks. Keep in mind that interlibrary loans take time, so do not expect to get a book at the last minute. The more lead time you provide a librarian to find a book you are looking for, the greater the likelihood that the book will be sent through the mail to your library on time.

The final type of library is an **Online-Only Library**. Online-Only Libraries contain a vast array of materials that are available online. With the influx of computer technology, we have started to create vast stores of digitized content from around the world. These online libraries contain full-text documents free of charge to everyone. Some online libraries we recommend are Project Gutenberg, Google Books, Read Print, Open Library, and eBookSoda. This is a short list of just a handful of the libraries that are now offering free e-content.

General-Interest Periodicals

The second category of information you may seek out includes **general-interest periodicals.** These are magazines and newsletters published on a fairly systematic basis. Some popular magazines in this category include *The New Yorker*, *People*, *Reader's Digest*, *Parade*, *Smithsonian*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. These magazines are considered "general interest" because most people in the United States could pick up a copy of these magazines and find them interesting and topical.

Special-Interest Periodicals

Special-interest periodicals are magazines and newsletters that are published for a narrower audience. In a 2005 article, *Business Wire* noted that in the United States, there are over ten thousand different magazines published annually, but only two thousand of those magazines have significant circulation. Some more widely known special-interest periodicals are *Sports Illustrated*, *Bloomberg's Business Week*, *Gentleman's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, *Popular Science*, and *House and Garden*. But for every major magazine, there are a great many other lesser-known magazines like *American Coin Op Magazine*, *Varmint Hunter*, *Shark Diver Magazine*, *Pet Product News International*, *Water Garden News*, to name just a few.

Newspapers and Blogs

Another major source of nonacademic information is newspapers and blogs. We are fortunate to live in a society that has a free press. In this chapter, we include newspapers and blogs in this category. Some blogs function similarly to traditional newspapers. Indeed, in the past few years, many traditional newspapers from cities around the United States that used to have four or five daily papers may now only have one or two.

According to The Paperboy, some of the most-read newspapers in the United States are *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, *the Washington Post,* and the *Los Angeles Times* (The Paperboy, n.d.). Most colleges and universities subscribe to a number of these newspapers in paper form or have access to them electronically. Furthermore, most college and university databases, such as Factiva, Nexis Uni, and EBSCO, have subscriptions to newspaper articles from these and other newspapers from around the world.

In addition to traditional newspapers, blogs are becoming a mainstay of information in today's society. In fact, in the 21st century, many major news stories have been broken by professional bloggers rather than traditional newspaper reporters (Ochman, 2007). Although anyone can create a blog, many reputable blog sites are run by professional journalists. As such, blogs can be a great source of information. However, as with all information on the Internet, you often have to wade through a lot of junk to find useful, accurate information.

Encyclopedias

Another type of source that you may encounter is the encyclopedia. **Encyclopedias** are information sources that provide short, very general information about a topic. Encyclopedias are available in both print and electronic formats, and their content ranges from eclectic and general (e.g., *Encyclopedia Britannica*) to highly specific (e.g., *Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture*, or *Encyclopedia of Afterlife Beliefs and Phenomena*). It is important to keep in mind that encyclopedias are designed to give only brief, fairly superficial summaries of a topic area. Thus, they may be useful for finding out what something is if it is referenced in another source, but they are generally not a useful source for your actual speech. In fact, many instructors do not allow students to use encyclopedias as sources for their speeches for this very reason.

One of the most popular online encyclopedic sources is Wikipedia. Like other encyclopedias, it can be useful for finding out basic information (e.g., what baseball teams did Catfish Hunter play for?), but it will not give you the depth of information you need for a speech. Also, keep in mind that Wikipedia, unlike the general and specialized encyclopedias available through your library, can be edited by anyone and therefore often contains content errors and biased information. If you are a fan of *The Colbert Report*, you probably know that host Stephen Colbert has, on several occasions, asked viewers to change Wikipedia content to reflect his views of the world. This is just one example of why one should always be careful of information on the web, but this advice is even more important when considering group-edited sites such as Wikipedia.



Figure 11.2.4: Several encyclopedia publications are seen stacked on a shelf. Encyclopedias are available in both print and electronic form and are appealing to students because they provide short, very general information about a topic. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Ziko via Wikimedia Commons)

Websites

Websites are the last major source of nonacademic information. We live in a world where there is a considerable amount of information readily available to us, at the touch of our fingers. Unfortunately, you can spend hours and hours searching for information and never quite find what you're looking for if you don't devise an Internet search strategy. First, you need to select a good search engine to help you find appropriate information. Table 11.2.1 "Scholarly Information on the Web" contains a list of common search engines and websites and the types of information they are useful for finding.

Academic Information Sources

After nonacademic sources, the second major source for finding information comes from academics. The main difference between academic information and the information you get from the popular press is oversight. In the nonacademic world, the primary gatekeeper of information is the editor, who may or may not be a content expert. In academia, we have established a way to perform a series of checks to ensure that the information is accurate and follows agreed-upon academic standards. For example, this book, or portions of this book, was read by dozens of academics who provided feedback. Having this extra step in the writing process is time-consuming, but it provides an extra level of confidence in the relevance and accuracy of the information. In this section, we will discuss scholarly books and articles, computerized databases, and finding scholarly information on the web.

Scholarly Books

College and university libraries are filled with books written by academics. According to the Text and Academic Authors Association, there are two types of scholarly books: textbooks and academic books. Textbooks are books that are written about a segment of content within a field of academic study and are written for undergraduate or graduate student audiences. These books tend to be very specifically focused. Take this book, for instance. We are not trying to introduce you to the entire world of human communication, just one small aspect of it: public speaking. Textbooks tend to be written at a fairly easy reading level and are designed to transfer information in a manner that mirrors classroom teaching to some extent. Also, textbooks are secondary sources of information. They are designed to survey the research available in a particular field rather than to present new research.

Academic books are books that are primarily written for other academics for informational and research purposes. Generally speaking, when instructors ask you to find scholarly books, they are referring to academic books. Thankfully, there are hundreds of thousands of academic books published on almost every topic you can imagine. In the field of communication, there are a handful of major publishers who publish academic books: SAGE, the American Psychological Association (www.apa.org/pubs/books), and the National Communication Association, among others. In addition to the major publishers who publish academic books, many university presses publish academic books: SUNY Press and Baylor University Press are just a few of them.

Scholarly Articles

Because most academic writing comes in the form of scholarly articles or journal articles, that is the best place for finding academic research on a given topic. Every academic subfield has its own journals, so you should never have a problem finding the best and most recent research on a topic. However, scholarly articles are written for a scholarly audience, so reading scholarly articles takes more time than if you were to read a magazine article in the popular press. It's also helpful to realize that there may be parts of the article you simply do not have the background knowledge to understand, and there is nothing wrong with that. Many research studies are conducted by quantitative researchers who rely on statistics to examine phenomena. Unless you have training in understanding statistics, it is difficult to interpret the statistical information that appears in these articles. Instead, focus on the beginning part of the article where the author(s) will discuss previous research (secondary research), and then focus on the end of the article, where the author(s) explain what was found in their research (primary research).

Computerized Databases

Finding academic research is easier today than it ever has been in the past because of large computer databases containing research. Here's how these databases work. A database company signs contracts with publishers to gain the right to store the publishers' content electronically. The database companies then create thematic databases containing publications related to general areas of knowledge (business, communication, psychology, medicine, etc.). The database companies then sell subscriptions to these databases to libraries.

The largest of these database companies is a group called EBSCO Publishing, which runs both EBSCO Host (an e-journal provider) and NetLibrary (a large e-book library). Some of the more popular databases that EBSCO provides to colleges and universities are: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Education Research Complete, Humanities International Complete, Philosopher's Index, Political Science Complete, PsycArticles, and Vocational and Career Collection. Academic Search Complete is the broadest of all the databases and casts a fairly wide net across numerous fields. Information that you find using databases can contain both nonacademic and academic information, so EBSCO Host has built in several filtering options to help you limit the types of information available.

We strongly recommend checking out your library's website to see what databases they have available and if they have any online tutorials for finding sources using the databases to which your library subscribes.

Scholarly Information on the Web

In addition to the subscription databases available on the web, there are also numerous excellent sources for scholarly information online. As mentioned earlier, however, finding scholarly information on the web poses a challenge because anyone can post information online. Fortunately, several great websites attempt to help filter this information for us.

Table 11.2.1: Scholarly Information on the Web lists several different websites that house scholarly information.

Table 11.2.1: Scholarly Information on the Web

Website	Type of Information
doaj.org	The Directory of Open Access Journals is an online database of all freely available academic journals online.
scholar.google.com	Google Scholar attempts to filter out non-academic information. Unfortunately, it tends to return a large number of for-pay site results.
clos.org	Communication Institute for Online Scholarship is a clearinghouse for online communication scholarship. This site contains full-text journals and books.
physicalsciences.library.cornell.edu	This is the link to the Cornell Open Access Library:
biomedcentral.com	BioMed Central provides open-access medical research.
freemedicaljournals.com	This site provides the public with free access to medical journals.
laneguides.stanford.edu	This is the link to the Stanford Open Access Library:
plosbiology.org	This is the Public Library of Science's journal for biology.

Website	Type of Information
dp. la	The Digital Public Library of America brings together the riches of America's libraries, archives, and museums and makes them freely available to the world. Source,.
vlib.org	The WWW Virtual Library provides annotated lists of websites compiled by scholars in specific areas.

Tips for Finding Information Sources

You have been given a few different places to start looking for research. The next step is to help you sort through the research. Below is a series of tips that should make the research process easier and help you find appropriate information quickly.

Create a Research Log

Nothing is more disheartening than when you find yourself at 1:00 a.m. asking, "Haven't I already read this?" One way to avoid the redundancy and endless loop that researchers can encounter is to create and maintain a research log. According to *The Elements of Library Research* by M. W. George, a research log is a "step-by-step account of the process of identifying, obtaining, and evaluating sources for a specific project, similar to a lab notebook in an experimental setting" (George, 2008). In essence, George believes that keeping a log of what you've done is very helpful because it can help you keep track of what you've read thus far. You can use a good old-fashioned notebook, or if you carry around your laptop or netbook with you, you can always keep it digitally. While there are expensive programs like Microsoft Office OneNote that can be used for note-taking, there are also several free tools that could be adapted as well.

Start with Background Information

It's not unusual for students to try to jump right into the meat of a topic, only to find out that there is a lot of technical language they just don't understand. For this reason, you may want to start your research with sources written for the general public. Generally, these lower-level sources are great for background information on a topic and are helpful when trying to learn the basic vocabulary of a subject area.

Search Your Library's Computers

Once you've started getting a general grasp of the broad content area you want to investigate, it's time to sit down and see what your school's library has to offer. If you do not have much experience in using your library's website, see if the website contains an online tutorial. Most schools offer online tutorials to show students the resources that they can access. If your school doesn't have an online tutorial, you may want to call your library and schedule an appointment with a research librarian to learn how to use the school's computers. Also, if you tell your librarian that you want to learn how to use the library, he or she may be able to direct you to online resources that you may have missed.

Try to search as many different databases as possible. Look for relevant books, e-books, newspaper articles, magazine articles, journal articles, and media files. Modern college and university libraries have a ton of sources, and one search may not find everything you are looking for on the first pass. Furthermore, don't forget to think about synonyms for topics. The more synonyms you can generate for your topic, the better you'll be at finding information.

Skimming Techniques

If you sit down and try to completely read every article or book you find, it will take you a very long time to get through all the information. Here is a list of things that can help you use your time more efficiently:

- Start by reading the introductory paragraphs.

Generally, the first few paragraphs will give you a good idea about the overall topic.

- If you're reading a research article, start by reading the abstract.

If the first few paragraphs or abstract don't sound like they're applicable, there's a good chance the source won't be useful for you.

- Look for highlighted, italicized, or bulleted information.

Generally, authors use highlighting, italics, and bullets to separate information to make it jump out for readers.

- Look for tables, charts, graphs, and figures.

All these forms are separated from the text to make the information more easily understandable for a reader, so seeing if the content is relevant is a way to see if it helps you.

- Look at headings and subheadings.

Headings and subheadings show you how an author has grouped information into meaningful segments. If you read the headings and subheadings and nothing jumps out as relevant, that's another indication that there may not be anything useful in that source.

- Take good notes by attaching a sticky note to each source.

If you find relevant information, write that information on the sticky note along with the page number. If you don't find useful information in a source, just write "nothing" on the sticky note and move on to the next source. This way, when you need to sort through your information, you'll be able to quickly see what information was useful and locate it. Other people prefer to create a series of note cards to help them organize their information. Whatever works best for you is what you should use.

Read Bibliographies/Reference Pages

After you've finished reading useful sources, look at the names of the sources that have been cited in their bibliographies or reference pages. We call this method backtracking. Often, the sou,rces cited by others can lead us to even better sources than the ones we found initially.

Ask for Help

Don't be afraid to ask for help. As we said earlier in this chapter, reference librarians are your friends. They won't do your work for you, but they are more than willing to help if you ask.

Evaluating Resources

The final step in research occurs once you've found resources relevant to your topic: evaluating the quality of those resources. Below is a list of six questions to ask yourself about the sources you've collected; these are drawn from the book *The Elements of Library Research* by M. W. George (George, 2008).

What Is the Date of Publication?

The first question you need to ask yourself is the date of the source's publication. Although there may be classic studies that you want to cite in your speech, generally, the more recent the information, the better your presentation will be. As an example, if you want to talk about the current state of women's education in the United States, relying on information from the 1950s that debated whether "coeds" should attend class along with male students is clearly not appropriate. Instead, you'd want to use information published within the past five to ten years.

Who Is the Author?

The next question you want to ask yourself is about the author. Who is the author? What are their credentials? Do they work for a corporation, college, or university? Is a political or commercial agenda apparent in the writing? The more information we can learn about an author, the better our understanding and treatment of that author's work will be. Furthermore, if we know that

an author is clearly biased in a specific manner, ethically, we must tell our audience members. If we pretend that an author is unbiased when we clearly know better, we are essentially lying to our audience. This can, in turn, diminish our personal credibility in the eyes of our audience.

Who Is the Publisher?

In addition to knowing who the author is, we also want to know who the publisher is. While there are many mainstream publishers and academic press publishers, there are also many fringe publishers. For example, maybe you're reading a research report published by the Cato Institute. While the Cato Institute may sound like a regular publisher, it is actually a libertarian think tank. As such, you can be sure that the information in its publications will have a specific political bias. While the person writing the research report may be an upstanding author with numerous credits, the Cato Institute only publishes reports that adhere to its political philosophy. Generally, a cursory examination of a publisher's website is a good indication of the specific political bias. Most websites will have an "About" section or an "FAQ" section that will explain who the publisher is.

Is It Academic or Nonacademic?

The next question you want to ask yourself is whether the information comes from an academic or a nonacademic source. Because of the enhanced scrutiny academic sources go through, we argue that you can generally rely more on the information contained in academic sources than nonacademic sources. One very notorious example of the difference between academic and nonacademic information can be seen in the problem of popular-culture author John Gray, author of *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. Gray, who received a PhD via a correspondence program from Columbia Pacific University in 1982, has written numerous books on the topic of men and women. Unfortunately, the academic research on the subject of sex and gender differences is often very much at odds with Gray's writing. For a great critique of Gray's writings, check out Julia Wood's article in the *Southern Communication Journal* (Wood, 2002). Ultimately, we strongly believe that using academic publications is always in your best interest because they generally contain the most reliable information.

What Is the Quality of the Bibliography/Reference Page?

Another great indicator of a well-thought-out and researched source is the quality of its bibliography or reference page. If you look at a source's bibliography or reference page and it has only a couple of citations, then you can assume that either the information was not properly cited or it was largely made up by someone. Even popular-press books can contain great bibliographies and reference pages, so checking them out is a great way to see if an author has done their homework before writing a text. As noted above, it is also an excellent way to find additional resources on a topic.

Do People Cite the Work?

The last question to ask about a source is, "Are other people actively citing the work?" One way to find out whether a given source is widely accepted is to see if numerous people are citing it. If you find an article that has been cited by many other authors, then clearly the work has been viewed as credible and useful. If you're doing research and you keep running across the same source over and over again, that is an indication that it's an important study that you should probably take a look at. Many colleges and universities also subscribe to the Science Citation Index (SCI), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), or the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), which are run through the Institute for Scientific Information's Web of Knowledge database service (isiwebofknowledge.com). All these databases help you find out where information has been cited by other researchers.

Key Takeaways

- In conducting research for a speech, commit adequate time and plan your schedule. Consider both the research time, or time spent gathering information, and the preparation time needed to organize and practice your speech.
- We live in a world dominated by information, but some information is filtered, and some is not. It's important to know the difference between academic and nonacademic sources.
- Nonacademic sources are a good place to gain general knowledge of a topic; these include books, general or special-interest periodicals, newspapers, blogs, and websites.
- Academic sources offer more specialized, higher-level information; they include books, articles, computer databases, and web resources.
- A fundamental responsibility is to evaluate the sources you choose to use to ensure that you are presenting accurate and

up-to-date information in your speech.

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11.3: Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Choosing Between Two Research Methods

Communication Studies is a diverse discipline that explores how individuals, groups, and societies create, share, and interpret messages that are exchanged. Studying these processes has been an investment for many scholars, who often have relied upon two major research traditions: qualitative and quantitative research. While both approaches aim to generate knowledge about human communication, they differ in their methods, goals, and applications. This section compares and contrasts the features, benefits, advantages, and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative research within Communication Studies, highlighting how each contributes to a fuller understanding of communication phenomena.

Features of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research focuses on exploring meaning, context, and interpretation. Instead of relying on numbers or statistics, it emphasizes language, symbols, and personal experiences. Common methods include interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and rhetorical or discourse analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). In Communication Studies, qualitative research often seeks to uncover how people create meaning in conversations, media, or cultural practices. For example, a researcher might analyze how online communities use memes to establish group identity or how organizational members negotiate workplace norms through informal talk.



Figure 11.3.1: Wiki Education Focus Group at Wiki Conference North America 2018. Focus Groups serve as a method of qualitative research. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Samantha (Wiki Ed) via Wikimedia Commons)

Features of Quantitative Research

Quantitative research emphasizes measurement, prediction, and generalizability. It relies on structured methods such as surveys, experiments, and content analysis, producing numerical data that can be analyzed statistically (Neuman, 2014). In Communication Studies, quantitative approaches are often used to test hypotheses, measure communication behaviors, and identify patterns across large populations. For instance, a scholar might conduct a survey to examine the relationship between media consumption and political attitudes, or design an experiment to test how message framing influences persuasion.



Figure 11.3.2: A researcher applies quantitative research methods in experiments he conducts in a lab. Experiments yield numerical data to prove or measure ideas or behaviors. (CC BY 2.0; Simon Fraser University Communications & Marketing via Wikimedia Commons)

Benefits and Advantages of Qualitative Research

One major advantage of qualitative research is its ability to capture the depth and richness of meaning. Because communication is often complex and context-dependent, qualitative approaches allow researchers to examine subtleties that numbers alone cannot convey (Tracy, 2020). They are especially useful for studying emerging communication practices, marginalized voices, or sensitive topics where personal experience and interpretation matter. Another benefit is flexibility: qualitative methods can adapt as new insights emerge, allowing the researcher to follow unexpected directions in the data.

Benefits and Advantages of Quantitative Research

Quantitative research offers strengths in terms of its reliability and **generalizability,** which occur when a small number of people are surveyed in the hopes of representing a much larger group of people, and precision and accuracy. By analyzing numerical data, researchers can identify trends, make predictions, and compare groups systematically (Wrench et al., 2018). Large-scale surveys, for example, provide evidence about how widespread a communication behavior is within a population. Experiments allow researchers to establish cause-and-effect relationships, such as whether a specific type of media message increases audience persuasion. These strengths make quantitative research especially valuable for informing policy, marketing strategies, or organizational practices.

Disadvantages of Qualitative Research

Despite its benefits, qualitative research has limitations. Findings are often context-specific and not easily generalizable to larger populations. Because analysis relies heavily on the researcher's interpretation, there is a risk of bias influencing the results (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Additionally, qualitative studies can be time-consuming, requiring extensive transcription, coding, and interpretation. In Communication Studies, critics sometimes argue that qualitative work lacks the rigor or objectivity associated with quantitative approaches.

Disadvantages of Quantitative Research

Quantitative research also faces challenges. Its reliance on numerical data can oversimplify the complexity of communication. Subtle meanings, cultural contexts, and emotional nuances may be lost when reduced to variables and statistics (Neuman, 2014). Surveys and experiments often require standardized instruments, which may fail to capture lived experiences or unexpected phenomena. In addition, quantitative research can be resource-intensive, requiring large samples, specialized software, and statistical expertise.

Integration of Both Approaches

Rather than viewing qualitative and quantitative research as opposites, many Communication scholars advocate for a **mixed-methods approach**. By combining both traditions, researchers can balance depth and breadth (Tracy, 2020). For example, a study might begin with qualitative interviews to explore how individuals experience intercultural communication, followed by a survey to test how widely these experiences occur in different populations. Mixed-methods designs recognize that communication is both measurable and interpretive, requiring multiple lenses for comprehensive understanding.

Use of AI in Research

In the information age of technology, the use of artificial intelligence to aid in the conducting of research is becoming more common. Many researchers find AI useful in terms of locating sources and materials for their studies. While AI can be helpful in this regard, it should be noted that AI-generated content can be inaccurate, misleading, or entirely fabricated (sometimes called "hallucinations") and may contain copyrighted material. You are ultimately responsible for any content that you publish or share that includes AI-generated material. It is therefore important to consider AI a tool, but not a replacement for good-quality research.

Key Takeaways

- Qualitative methods excel at uncovering meaning, context, and personal experience.
- Quantitative methods provide precision, generalizability, and predictive power.
- Limitations of qualitative research include a lack of generalizability.
- Limitations in quantitative research include a lack of nuance in quantitative research.
- A mixed-methods approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing scholars to gain richer, more balanced insights into how humans create and interpret messages.

Attributions:

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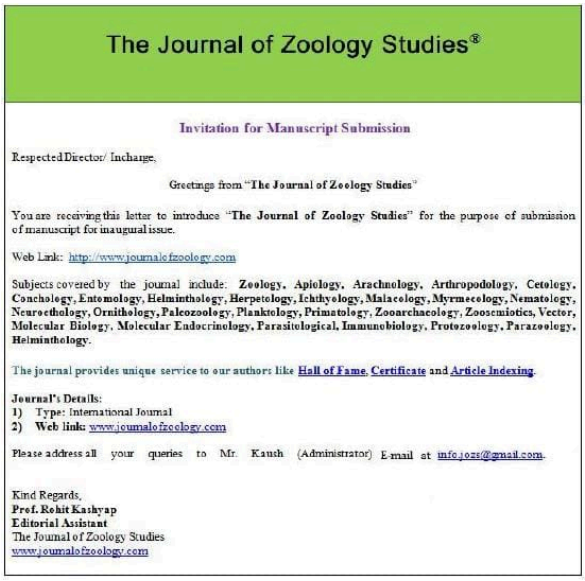
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11.4: Citing Sources

Credibility Through Source Citation

Looking through countless sources can be exhausting, but there's still some important work to be done. Most communication teachers will require you to turn in either a bibliography or a reference page with your speeches. Teachers will invariably encourage the use of **peer-reviewed citations.** But what are peer-reviewed citations, and what makes them so special? Peer-reviewed citations come from peer-reviewed journals, which are scholarly publications in which submitted articles are evaluated by independent experts (peers) in the same field before being published. This review process ensures that the research meets standards of accuracy, quality, and credibility. Therefore, when a student cites a source from a Peer-reviewed and/or scholarly publication, that student's credibility is stellar, by virtue of citing a quality source that has been peer-reviewed. In this section, we're going to explore how to properly cite your sources in two styles: **Modern Language Association (MLA)** and **American Psychological Association (APA),** as well as how to avoid plagiarism, which is using someone else's work without proper attribution to the original author or source.

The Modern Language Association style, or MLA**,** lists its sources as 'Works Cited'. Scholars in the various humanities fields (e.g., English, philosophy, rhetoric) are more likely to use MLA style. The American Psychological Association style, or APA, lists its sources as 'References'. Generally speaking, scholars in the various social science fields (e.g., psychology, human communication, business) are more likely to use APA style.



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Figure 11.4.1: The Journal of Zoology Studies is an esteemed peer-reviewed journal in the discipline of Zoological Science. Public speaking teachers encourage students to choose journals that have been peer-reviewed to support their work. (CC BY-SA 3.0; journalofzoology via Wikimedia Commons)

Why Citing Is Important

Citing is important because it enables your viewing and/or listening audience to see where you found information cited within a speech, article, or book. Some communication course instructors will suggest that if a speaker cites a source within a speech, they can abbreviate the citation. For example: "The FDA states that..." vs. "According to the FDA..." Failure to cite sources or citing information incorrectly is considered plagiarism, so ethically, we want to make sure that we give credit to the authors we use in a speech. While there are numerous citation styles to choose from, the two most common style choices for public speaking are APA and MLA.

APA VS. MLA Source Citations

Style refers to those components or features of a literary composition or oral presentation that have to do with the form of expression rather than the content expressed (e.g., language, punctuation, parenthetical citations, and endnotes). The APA and the MLA have created the two most commonly used style guides in academia today. Generally speaking, scholars in the various social science fields (e.g., psychology, human communication, business) are more likely to use APA style, and scholars in the various humanities fields (e.g., English, philosophy, rhetoric) are more likely to use MLA style. The two styles are quite different from each other, so learning them does take time.

APA Citations

The first common reference style your teacher may ask for is APA. As of October 2019, the American Psychological Association published the seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association, 2019). The seventh edition provides considerable guidance on working with and citing Internet sources. Table 11.4.1 "APA Seventh Edition Citations" provides a list of common citation examples that you may need for your speech.

Table 11.4.1 *APA Seventh Edition Citations*

Research Article in a Journal—One Author.com	**Harmon, M. D. (2006). Affluenza: A world values test. *The International Communication Gazette, 68*(2), 119–130. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048506062228**
Research Article in a Journal—Two to Five Authors	Hoffner, C., & Levine, K. J. (2005). Enjoyment of mediated fright and violence: A meta-analysis. *Media Psychology, 7*(2), 207–237. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0702_5
Book	Eysenck, H. J. (1982). *Personality, genetics, and behavior: Selected papers*. Praeger Publishers.
Book with 6 or More Authors	Huston, A. C., Donnerstein, E., Fairchild, H., Katz, P. A., Murray, J. P., Rubinstein, E. A., Wilcox, B. L., & Zuckerman, D. (1992). *Big world, small screen: The role of television in American society*. University of Nebraska Press.
Chapter in an Edited Book	Tamborini, R. (1991). Responding to horror: Determinants of exposure and appeal. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Responding to the screen: Reception and reaction processes* (pp. 305–329). Lawrence Erlbaum.
Self-Published Book	Eager, B. (2023, March 29). *Academic writing AI prompt phrasebook: 500+ example prompts to accelerate academic writing and research* [Kindle edition]. Amazon.com. https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0C12643GD
Newspaper Article	Thomason, D. (2010, March 31). Dry weather leads to a burn ban. *The Sentinel-Record*, p. A1.
Magazine Article	Finney, J. (2010, March–April). The new "new deal": How to communicate a changed employee value proposition to a skeptical audience—and realign employees within the organization. *Communication World, 27*(2), 27–30.
Preprint Version of an Article	Blitch, M., Alley, E., & Dailey, R. (2025). Affectionate communication, conflict styles, and satisfaction in romantic relationships with and without partners with ADHD. *Communication Research Reports*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2025.2492005
Electronic-Only Journal Article	Molyneaux, H., O'Donnell, S., Gibson, K., & Singer, J. (2008). Exploring the gender divide on YouTube: An analysis of the creation and reception of vlogs. *American Communication Journal, 10*(1). https://www.acjournal.org/
Electronic Version of a Printed Book	Wood, A. F., & Smith, M. J. (2004). *Online communication: Linking technology, identity, & culture* (2nd ed.). www.books.google.com
Electronic Version of a Printed Book	Wood, A. F., & Smith, M. J. (2004). *Online communication: Linking technology, identity, & culture* (2nd ed.). www.books.google.com
Online Magazine	Levine, T. (2009, June). To catch a liar. *Communication Currents, 4* (3).

Research Article in a Journal—One Author.com	**Harmon, M. D. (2006). Affluenza: A world values test. *The International Communication Gazette, 68*(2), 119–130. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048506062228**
Online Newspaper	Clifford, S. (2009, June 1). Online, "a reason to keep going." *The New York Times*.
Entry in an Online Reference Work	Communication. (n.d.). In the *Random House dictionary* (9th ed.). https://dictionary.reference.com/browse/communication

MLA Citations

The second common reference style your teacher may ask for is MLA. In April 2016, the Modern Language Association published the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Modern Language Association, 2009) (www.mla.org/style). The eighth edition provides considerable guidance for citing online sources and new media such as graphic narratives. Table 11.4.2 "MLA Eighth Edition Citations" provides a list of common citations you may need for your speech.

Table 11.4.2: MLA Eighth Edition Citations

Research Article in a Journal—One Author	**Harmon, Mark D. "Affluenza: A World Values Test." *The International Communication Gazette*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2006, pp. 119–130.**
Research Article in a Journal—Two to Four Authors	Hoffner, Cynthia, and Keren J. Levine. "Enjoyment of Mediated Fright and Violence: A Meta-Analysis." *Media Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2005, pp. 207–237.
Book	Eysenck, Hans J. *Personality, Genetics, and Behavior: Selected Papers*. Praeger Publishers, 1982.
Book with Four or More Authors	Huston, Aletha C., et al. *Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society*. University of Nebraska Press, 1992.
Chapter in an Edited Book	Tamobrini, Ron. "Responding to Horror: Determinants of Exposure and Appeal." *Responding to the Screen: Reception and Reaction Processes*, edited by Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991, pp. 305–329.
Newspaper Article	Thomason, Dan. "Dry Weather Leads to Burn Ban." *The Sentinel Record*, 31 Mar. 2010, p. A1.
Magazine Article	Finney, John. "The New 'New Deal': How to Communicate a Changed Employee Value Proposition to a Skeptical Audience—And Realign Employees Within the Organization." *Communication World*, vol. 27, no. 2, Mar.–Apr. 2010, pp. 27–30.
Preprint Version of an Article	Laudel, Grit und Joken Gläser. "Tensions Between Evaluations and Communication Practices." *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, preprint version, Grit Laudel's Website, 15 July 2009.
Blog	Wrench, Jason S. "AMA's Managerial Competency Model." *Workplace Learning and Performance Network Blog*, 3 June 2009, workplacelearning.info/blog/?p=182.
Wikipedia	"Organizational Communication." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, n.d., en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizational_communication.
Vlog	Wrench, Jason S. "Instructional Communication." *The Learning Journal Videos*, 15 May 2009.
Discussion Board	Wrench, Jason S. "NCA's iTunes Project." *National Communication Association LinkedIn Group*, 21 May 2009.
E-mail List	McAllister, Matt. "New Listserv: Critical Approaches to Ads/Consumer Culture &Media Studies." *CRTNet*, 19 June 2009, lists.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0906&L=CRTNET&T=0&F=&S=&P=20514.

Research Article in a Journal—One Author	Harmon, Mark D. "Affluenza: A World Values Test." *The International Communication Gazette*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2006, pp. 119–130.
Podcast	Wrench, Jason S., and Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik, narrators. "Workplace Bullying." *CommuniCast*, 9 July 2009.
Electronic-Only Book	Richmond, Virginia P., Jason S. Wrench, and Joan Gorham. *Communication, Affect, and Learning in the Classroom*. 3rd ed., 2009.
Electronic-Only Journal Article	Molyneaux, Heather, Susan O'Donnell, Kerri Gibson, and Janice Singer. "Exploring the Gender Divide on YouTube: An Analysis of the Creation and Reception of Vlogs." *American Communication Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, acjournal.org.
Electronic Version of a Printed Book	Wood, Andrew F., and Matthew J. Smith. *Online Communication: Linking Technology, Identity & Culture*. 2nd ed., 2005, books.google.com.
Online Magazine	Levine, Timothy. "To Catch a Liar." *Communication Currents*, June, 2009.
Online Newspaper	Clifford, Stephanie. "Online, 'A Reason to Keep Going.'" *The New York Times*, 1 June, 2009.
Entry in an Online Reference Work	Viswanath, K. "Health Communication." *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2008.
Entry in an Online Reference Work, No Author	"Communication." *Random House Dictionary Online*, 9th ed., 2009, dictionary.reference.com/browse/communication.
E-Reader Device	Lutgen-Sandvik, Pamela, and Beverly Davenport Sypher. *Destructive Organizational Communication: Processes, Consequences, & Constructive Ways of Organizing*. Kindle ed., Routledge, 2009.

Citing Sources Within A Speech

Once you have decided what sources best help you explain important terms and ideas in your speech or help you build your arguments, it's time to place them into your speech. In this section, we're going to quickly talk about using your research effectively within your speeches. Citing sources within a speech is a three-step process: set up the citation, give the citation, and explain the citation.

First, you want to set up your audience for the citation. The setup is one or two sentences that provide general statements, leading to the specific information you will discuss from your source. Here's an example: "Workplace bullying is becoming an increasing problem for US organizations." Notice that this statement doesn't provide a specific citation yet, but the statement introduces the basic topic.

Second, you want to deliver the source; whether it is a direct quotation or a paraphrase of information from a source doesn't matter at this point. A direct quotation is when you cite the actual words from a source with no changes. To paraphrase is to take a source's basic idea and condense it using your own words. Here's an example of both:

Table 11.4.3*: Citing Sources Within a Speech*

Direct Quotation. In	In a 2009 report titled ***Bullying: Getting Away With It***, the Workplace Bullying Institute wrote, "Doing nothing to the bully (ensuring impunity) was the most common employer tactic (54%)."
Paraphrase	According to a 2009 study by the Workplace Bullying Institute titled *Bullying: Getting Away With It*, when employees reported bullying, 54 percent of employers did nothing at all.

You'll notice that in both of these cases, we started by citing the author of the study—in this case, the Workplace Bullying Institute. We then provided the title of the study. You could also provide the name of the article, book, podcast, movie, or other source. In the direct quotation example, we took information right from the report. In the second example, we summarized the same

information (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2009).

Let's look at another example of direct quotations and paraphrases, this time using a person rather than an institution as the author.

Table 11.4.4: Citing a Source That Is a Person, Within a Speech

Direct Quotation	**In her book *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know*, Mary George, senior reference librarian at Princeton University's library, defines insight as something that "occurs at an unpredictable point in the research process and leads to the formulation of a thesis statement and argument. Also called an 'Aha' moment or focus."**
Paraphrase	In her book *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know*, Mary George, senior reference librarian at Princeton University's library, tells us that insight is likely to come unexpectedly during the research process; it will be an "aha!" moment when we suddenly have a clear vision of the point we want to make.

Notice that the same basic pattern for citing sources was followed in both cases.

The final step in correct source citation within a speech is the explanation. One of the biggest mistakes novice public speakers (and research writers) make is including a source citation without following up on it. Instead, take the time to explain the quotation or paraphrase to put it into the context of your speech. Do not let your audience draw their own conclusions about the quotation or paraphrase. Instead, help them make the connections you want them to make. Here are two examples using the examples above:

Table 11.4.5: Explanation of Source Citations

Bullying Example	**Clearly, organizations need to be held accountable for investigating bullying allegations. Suppose organizations will not voluntarily improve their handling of this problem. In that case, the legal system may be required to step in and enforce sanctions for bullying, much as it has done with sexual harassment.**
Aha! Example	As many of us know, reaching that "aha!" moment does not always come quickly, but there are definitely some strategies one can take to help speed up this process.

Notice how in both of our explanations, we took the source's information and then added to it to direct it to our specific purpose. In the case of the bullying citation, we then propose that businesses should either adopt workplace bullying guidelines or face legal intervention. In the case of the "aha!" example, we turn the quotation into a section on helping people find their thesis or topic. In both cases, we were able to use the information to further our speech.

Using Sources Ethically

The last section of this chapter is about using sources ethically. Whether you are using primary or secondary research, there are five basic ethical issues you need to consider.

Avoid Plagiarism

First and foremost, if the idea isn't yours, you need to cite where the information came from during your speech. Having the citation listed on a bibliography or reference page is only half of the correct citation. You must provide correct citations for all your sources within the speech as well.

In *Avoiding Plagiarism: A Student Guide to Writing Your Own Work*, Menager-Beeley and Paulos provide a list of twelve detailed strategies for avoiding plagiarism (Menager-Beeley & Paulos, 2009). Below are the twelve strategies, divided into two groups: pre-speech and during-speech strategies.

Pre-Speech Strategies to Avoid Plagiarism

- *Do your own work, and use your own words.* One of the goals of a public speaking class is to develop skills that you'll use in the world outside academia. When you are in the workplace and the "real world," you'll be expected to think for yourself, so you might as well start learning this skill now.

- *Do not rework another student's speech or buy a 'speech mill' speech.* In today's Internet environment, there are a number of storehouses of student speeches on the Internet. Some of these speeches are freely available, while other websites charge money for getting access to one of their canned speeches. Whether you use a freely available speech or pay money for a speech, you are engaging in plagiarism. This is also true if the main substance of your speech was copied from a web page. Any time you try to present someone else's ideas as your own during a speech, you are plagiarizing.
- *Allow yourself enough time to research the assignment.* One of the most commonly cited excuses students give for plagiarism is that they didn't have enough time to do the research. In this chapter, we've stressed the necessity of giving yourself plenty of time. The more complete your research strategy is from the very beginning, the more successful your research endeavors will be in the long run. Remember, not having adequate time to prepare is no excuse for plagiarism.
- *Keep a careful track of your sources.* A common mistake that people can make is that they forget where the information came from when they start creating the speech itself. Chances are, you're going to look at dozens of sources when preparing your speech, and it is very easy to suddenly find yourself believing that a piece of information is "common knowledge" and not citing that information within a speech. When you keep track of your sources, you're less likely to inadvertently lose sources and not cite them correctly.
- *Take careful notes.* However you decide to keep track of the information you collect (old-fashioned pen and notebook or a computer software program), the more careful your note-taking is, the less likely you'll find yourself inadvertently not citing information or citing the information incorrectly. It doesn't matter what method you choose for taking research notes, but whatever you do, you need to be systematic to avoid plagiarism.
- *Assemble your thoughts, and make it clear who is speaking.* When creating your speech, you need to make sure that you clearly differentiate your voice in the speech from the voice of specific authors of the sources you quote. The easiest way to do this is to set up a direct quotation or a paraphrase, as we've described in the preceding sections. Remember, audience members cannot see where the quotation marks are located within your speech text, so you need to clearly articulate with words and vocal tone when you are using someone else's ideas within your speech.

During Speech Strategies to Avoid Plagiarism

- *If you use an idea, a quotation, a paraphrase, or a summary, then credit the source.* We can't reiterate it enough: if it is not your idea, you need to tell your audience where the information came from. Giving credit is especially important when your speech includes a statistic, an original theory, or a fact that is not common knowledge.
- *Learn how to cite sources correctly both in the body of your speech and in your List of Works Cited* (*Reference Page*). Most public speaking teachers will require that you turn in either a bibliography or a reference page on the day you deliver a speech. Many students make the mistake of thinking that the bibliography or reference page is all they need to cite information, and then they don't cite any of the material within the speech itself. A bibliography or reference page enables a reader or listener to find those sources after the fact, but you must also correctly cite those sources within the speech itself; otherwise, you are plagiarizing.
- *Quote accurately and sparingly.* A public speech should be based on factual information and references, but it shouldn't be a string of direct quotations strung together. Experts recommend that no more than 10 percent of a paper or speech be direct quotations (Menager-Beeley & Paulos, 2009). When selecting direct quotations, always ask yourself if the material could be paraphrased in a manner that would make it clearer for your audience. If the author wrote a sentence in a way that is just perfect, and you don't want to tamper with it, then by all means, directly quote the sentence. But if you're just quoting because it's easier than putting the ideas into your own words, this is not a legitimate reason for including direct quotations.
- *Paraphrase carefully.* Modifying an author's words in this way is not simply a matter of replacing some of the words with synonyms. Instead, as Howard and Taggart explain in *Research Matters*, "paraphrasing forces you to understand your sources and to capture their meaning accurately in original words and sentences" (Howard & Taggart, 2010). Incorrect paraphrasing is one of the most common forms of inadvertent plagiarism by students. First and foremost, paraphrasing is putting the author's argument, intent, or ideas into *your* own words.
- *Do not patchwrite* (*patchspeak*). Menager-Beeley and Paulos define patchwriting as consisting of mixing several references and arranging paraphrases and quotations to constitute much of the paper. In essence, the student has assembled others' work with a bit of embroidery here and there, but with little original thinking or expression" (Menager-Beeley & Paulos, 2009). Just as students can patchwrite, they can also engage in patchspeaking. In patchspeaking, students rely completely on taking quotations and paraphrases and weaving them together in a manner that is devoid of the student's original thinking.
- *Summarize, don't auto-summarize.* Some students have learned that most word processing features have an auto-summary function. The auto-summary function will take a ten-page document and summarize the information into a short paragraph. When someone uses the auto-summary function, the words that remain in the summary are still those of the original author, so this is not an ethical form of paraphrasing.

Avoid Academic Fraud

While there are numerous websites where you can download free speeches for your class, this is tantamount to fraud. If you didn't do the research and write your own speech, then you are fraudulently trying to pass off someone else's work as your own. In addition to being unethical, many institutions have student codes that forbid such activity. Penalties for academic fraud can be as severe as suspension or expulsion from your institution.

Beyond the moral and ethical issues, plagiarism and abuse of AI shortchange students by taking away the valuable experience of developing critical thinking, research, and writing skills. These skills are essential for success in graduate school, in the workplace, and beyond.

Don't Mislead Your Audience

If you know a source is clearly biased. Source,. and you don't spell this out for your audience, then you are purposefully trying to mislead or manipulate your audience. Instead, if the information may be biased, tell your audience that the information may be biased and allow your audience to decide whether to accept or disregard the information.

Give Author Credentials

You should always provide the author's credentials. In a world where anyone can say anything and have it published on the Internet or even publish it in a book, we have to be skeptical of the information we see and hear. For this reason, it's very important to provide your audience with background about the credentials of the authors you cite.

Use Primary Research Ethically

Lastly, if you are using primary research within your speech, you need to use it ethically as well. For example, if you tell your survey participants that the research is anonymous or confidential, then you need to make sure that you maintain their anonymity or confidentiality when you present those results. Furthermore, you also need to be respectful if someone says something is "off the record" during an interview. We must always maintain the privacy and confidentiality of participants during primary research, unless we have their express permission to reveal their names or other identifying information.

Key Takeaways

- Social science disciplines, such as psychology, human communication, and business, typically use APA style, while humanities disciplines, such as English, philosophy, and rhetoric, typically use MLA style.
- Citing sources within your speech is a three-step process: set up the citation, provide the cited information, and interpret the information within the context of your speech.
- A direct quotation is any time you utilize another individual's words in a format that resembles the way they were originally said or written. On the other hand, a paraphrase is when you take someone's ideas and restate them using your own words to convey the intended meaning.
- Ethically using sources means avoiding plagiarism, not engaging in academic fraud, making sure not to mislead your audience, providing credentials for your sources so the audience can make judgments about the material, and using primary research in ways that protect the identity of participants.
- Plagiarism is a huge problem and creeps its way into student writing and oral presentations. As ethical communicators, we must always give credit for the information we convey in our writing and our speeches.

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11.5: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

Research can inspire mixed feelings among students. Some students enjoy the discovery process, while others find it time-consuming or tedious. In communication studies, research means carefully investigating a topic to uncover, revise, or explain facts, theories, and practical applications. Whether you love or dislike it, research is an essential part of academic and professional growth. It forms the foundation for progress across many fields, from science and technology to the arts. In communication, research helps answer questions about human interaction, media influence, and social behavior through two major approaches: quantitative, which is focused on numbers and measurable data, and qualitative, which is focused on experiences, meanings, and emotions.

There are several types of research used in communication studies. Theoretical research builds or refines ideas about how communication works, while empirical research collects data through methods like surveys, interviews, or experiments. Applied research solves real-world problems, such as improving public relations or understanding social media's effects. Critical research examines issues of power and inequality, and interdisciplinary research connects communication with fields like sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. Together, these approaches deepen our understanding of how messages shape people, organizations, and societies.

Research has three main functions, which are: discovering, revising, and reporting. Discovering involves finding something new, such as Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin. Revising improves or expands on past discoveries—like the creation of azithromycin, which built on Fleming's work. Reporting involves gathering information and sharing it with others, such as explaining the history of antibiotics. These three processes work together to build human knowledge.

Research often aims to produce facts, theories, and applications. Facts are truths supported by evidence, though few are absolute. Theories explain phenomena that can be tested and refined over time—like the ongoing scientific exploration of gravity. Applications take existing knowledge and use it in new ways, such as turning the botulism bacterium into the widely used medical and cosmetic treatment Botox. Ultimately, research is what drives innovation, deepens understanding, and helps us make informed decisions in both academic and everyday life.

Effective research involves strategy and organization. Students should keep a research log to track sources, start with general background reading, use multiple databases, and learn to skim efficiently. Evaluating sources is also key—students should consider publication dates, authors' credentials, and potential biases. Academic credibility depends on citing trustworthy, up-to-date, and well-referenced materials. Reading the bibliographies of strong sources can also lead to new, relevant research.

Once students have completed their research and incorporated it into their speeches, they will need to credit their sources through proper attribution. This is crucial, both ethically, in terms of properly acknowledging sources, and also legally, in terms of following copyright guidelines.

At its core, research is about curiosity, it is about asking good questions and finding trustworthy answers. It can be rewarding because it exposes you to new ideas and perspectives, helping you see the world in new ways. Research also sparks creativity, encouraging you to explore new interests or develop new skills. Though it requires effort and time, research opens doors to discovery and growth when you learn to use the right strategies and tools.

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11.7: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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11.7.1: Exercises

11.1: What is Research?

1. Make a list of research projects you have conducted in your academic career. Did your research help revise facts, theories, or applications?
2. With a group of classmates, identify when it is better to use primary research and when it is better to use secondary research.
3. Create a short survey, designed to collect simple data from your classmates. How effective would you say the survey is?

11.2: Developing a Research Strategy

1. Find an academic and a nonacademic source about the same topic. How is the writing style different? How useful is the content in each source? Which source has more authority? Why?
2. Download one of the freeware software packages for creating a research log for one of your speech preparations. Do you like using the software? Is the software cumbersome or helpful? Would you use the software for organizing other speeches or other research projects? Why?
3. Find a politically oriented website and analyze the material using George's six questions for evaluating sources (George, 2008). What does your analysis say about the material on the website?

11.3: Quantitative and Qualitative Research

1. Provide two examples of studies that would be best studied using quantitative research
2. Design a small qualitative research method for an area of study.
3. Design a small qualitative research survey.

11.4: Citing Sources

1. List what you think are the benefits of APA style and the benefits of MLA style. Why do you think some people prefer APA style over MLA style or vice versa?
2. Find a direct quotation within a magazine article. Paraphrase that direct quotation. Then attempt to paraphrase the entire article as well. How would you cite each of these orally within the body of your speech?
3. Which of Menager-Beeley and Paulos (2009) twelve strategies for avoiding plagiarism do you think you need the most help with right now? Why? What can you do to overcome and avoid that pitfall?

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11.7.2: Discussion Questions

11.1: What is Research:

1. Why do you think research is described as both challenging and rewarding? Can you relate this to your own learning experiences?
2. Of the three types of research—discovering, revising, and reporting—which do you think has the greatest impact on society today, and why?
3. Why is it important to distinguish between primary and secondary research when preparing a speech or academic paper?

11.2: Developing a Research Strategy:

1. How does effective time management influence the overall quality of a student's speech preparation and delivery?
2. What strategies help students evaluate the credibility and reliability of research sources for speeches?
3. How has digital access to libraries and online databases changed the way college students conduct academic research?

11.3: Quantitative and Qualitative Research

1. Why do you think it's important for Communication scholars to use both qualitative and quantitative research methods when studying human communication? Can you think of a topic where combining both would give a fuller picture?
2. Qualitative research focuses on *meaning and context*, while quantitative research emphasizes *measurement and prediction*. In your opinion, which approach seems more effective for studying how people communicate online—and why?
3. Both research traditions face limitations such as bias, time, or oversimplification. Which type of limitation do you think is harder to overcome in Communication Studies: researcher bias in qualitative work, or loss of nuance in quantitative studies? Explain your reasoning.

11.4: Citing Sources

1. What are some of the key differences between citing sources in APA Style vs. MLA style?
2. Name three ways to avoid plagiarism.
3. What is some verbiage one might use when citing a source within a speech?

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12: DELIVERY AND STYLE

Overview

This chapter discusses building confident speaking skills by addressing communication apprehension, exploring its common causes, and offering practical strategies to manage public speaking fears. You will also learn how to deliver speeches successfully by examining the essential components of a strong delivery, including vocal variety, body language, and audience connection. We will highlight four methods of delivery and explain how different speaking contexts influence style and effectiveness. In addition, the chapter emphasizes the strategic use of notes and the vital role of consistent practice. Understanding how to apply this information can help you create and deliver stronger, more confident presentations.

Chapter Goals

- Identify the causes of communication apprehension and strategies to manage it.
- Examine the essential components of a strong speech delivery.
- Differentiate between the four methods of delivery.
- Analyze how speaking contexts influence delivery style and effectiveness.
- Apply strategies such as note use and practice to improve presentation skills.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Audience Anxiety
- Audience Size
- Cognitive Restructuring
- Communication Apprehension
- Context Anxiety
- Conversational Style
- Deep Breathing
- Extemporaneous Delivery
- Eye Contact
- Formality Anxiety
- Impromptu Delivery
- Isometric Exercises
- Laptop Notes
- Lectern
- Manuscript Delivery
- Memorized Delivery
- Microphone
- Negative Self-Talk
- Note Cards
- Novelty Anxiety
- Outdoor Settings
- Paper Notes
- Pauses
- Phone Notes
- Physical Movement
- Physical Space

- Positive Self-Talk
- Positive Visualization
- Pitch
- Presentation Slide Notes
- Pronunciation
- Rate
- Situational Anxiety
- Tablet Notes
- Trait Anxiety
- Uncertainty Anxiety
- Videoconference Notes
- Videoconferencing
- Vocal Variety
- Vocal Warm-Ups
- Vocalics
- Volume

12.1: What is Communication Apprehension?
12.2: Why Do We Get Communication Apprehension?
12.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension
12.4: Four Methods of Delivery
12.5: Speaking Contexts that Affect Delivery
12.6: Using Notes Effectively
12.7: Practicing for Successful Speech Delivery
12.8: Chapter Wrap-Up
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12.10: Teacher Resources
12.10.1: Exercises
12.10.2: Discussion Questions

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12.1: What is Communication Apprehension?

Public Speaking Is a Common Fear

One of your biggest concerns about public speaking might be how to deal with nervousness or unexpected events. If that's the case, you're not alone—fear of speaking in public consistently ranks at the top of lists of people's common fears. Some people are not joking when they say they would rather die than stand up and speak in front of a live audience. The fear of public speaking ranks alongside the fear of flying, death, and spiders (Wallechinsky et al., 1977). Even if you are one of the fortunate few who don't typically get nervous when speaking in public, it's important to recognize things that can go wrong and be mentally prepared for them. On occasion, everyone misplaces speaking notes, has technical difficulties with a presentation aid, or gets distracted by an audience member. Speaking confidently involves knowing how to deal with these and other unexpected events while speaking.

In this section, we explore communication apprehension in a public speaking setting, focusing on the anxiety linked to communication and its impact on individuals in diverse speaking situations. We explain why communication apprehension causes many of us to have physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat and shaking hands, while also debunking myths that misinform speakers and increase fear. While some nervousness is normal and even beneficial, much of the time, this anxiety is counterproductive. So we will be providing ways to reduce communication apprehension, such as recognizing audience empathy, understanding natural physiological responses, and practicing proven strategies for managing anxiety, building speaker confidence, and ultimately improving communication effectiveness.

"Speech is a mirror of the soul," commented Publilius Syrus, a popular writer in 42 BCE (Bartlett, 1914). Other people come to know who we are through our words. Many different social situations, ranging from job interviews to dating to public speaking, can make us feel uncomfortable as we anticipate that we will be evaluated and judged by others. How well we communicate is intimately connected to our self-image, and the process of revealing ourselves to the evaluation of others can be threatening, whether we are meeting new acquaintances, participating in group discussions, or speaking in front of an audience.

Defining Communication Apprehension

According to James McCroskey, **communication apprehension** is the broad term that refers to an individual's "fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 2001). At its heart, communication apprehension is a psychological response to evaluation. This psychological response, however, quickly becomes physical as our body responds to the threat the mind perceives. Our brain is trying to give the body the right signals, and sometimes sends the wrong message. Our bodies cannot distinguish between psychological and physical threats, so we react as though we were facing a Mack truck barreling in our direction. The body's circulatory and adrenal systems shift into overdrive, preparing us to function at maximum physical efficiency—the "fight or flight" response (Sapolsky, 2004). Yet instead of running away or fighting, all we need to do is stand and talk. When it comes to communication apprehension, our physical responses are often not well adapted to the nature of the threat we face, as the excess energy created by our body can make it harder for us to be effective public speakers. But because communication apprehension is rooted in our minds, if we understand more about the nature of the body's responses to stress, we can better develop mechanisms for managing the body's misguided attempts to help us cope with our fear of social judgment.

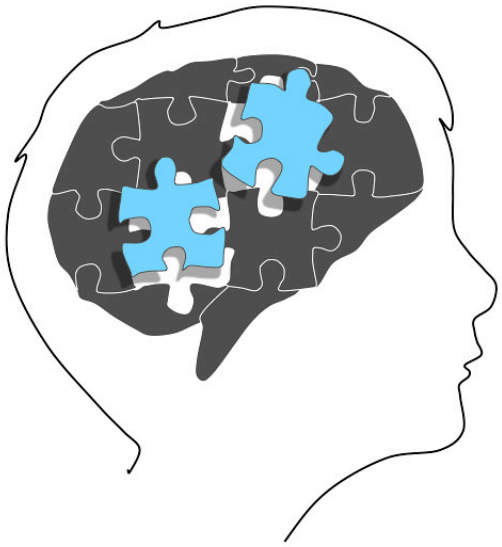


Figure 12.1.1: Our brain tries to make sense of the world for us. But as this brain, illustrated as a puzzle, shows, sometimes a few pieces don't fit. (CCO 1.0; Raquel Mela Wikimedia Commons)

Physiological Symptoms of Communication Apprehension

There are a number of physical sensations associated with communication apprehension. We might notice our heart pounding or our hands feeling clammy. We may break out in a sweat. We may have “stomach butterflies” or even feel nauseated. Our hands and legs might start to shake, or we may begin to pace nervously. Our voices may quiver, and we may have a “dry mouth” sensation that makes it difficult to articulate even simple words. Breathing becomes more rapid and, in extreme cases, we might feel dizzy or light-headed. Anxiety about communicating is profoundly disconcerting because we feel powerless to control our bodies. Furthermore, we may become so anxious that we fear we will forget our name, much less remember the main points of the speech we are about to deliver.

The physiological changes produced in the body at critical moments are designed to contribute to the efficient use of muscles and expand available energy. Circulation and breathing become more rapid so that additional oxygen can reach the muscles. Increased circulation causes us to sweat. Adrenaline rushes through our body, instructing the body to speed up its movements. If we stay immobile behind a lectern, this hormonal urge to speed up may produce shaking and trembling. Additionally, digestive processes are inhibited, so we will not lapse into the relaxed, sleepy state that is typical after eating. Instead of feeling sleepy, we feel butterflies in the pit of our stomach. By understanding what is happening to our bodies in response to the stress of public speaking, we can better cope with these reactions and channel them in constructive directions.

Myths about Communication Apprehension

A wealth of conventional wisdom surrounds the discomfort of speaking anxiety, as it surrounds almost any phenomenon that makes us uncomfortable. Most of this “folk” knowledge misleads us, directing our attention away from effective strategies for thinking about and coping with anxiety reactions.

True or False?

- **People who suffer from speaking anxiety are neurotic:** As we have explained, speaking anxiety is a normal reaction. Good speakers can get nervous just as poor speakers do. Winston Churchill, for example, would get physically ill before major speeches in Parliament. Yet he rallied the British people in a time of crisis. Many people, even the most professional performers, experience anxiety about communicating. Such a widespread problem, Dr. Joyce Brothers contends, “cannot be attributed to deep-seated neuroses” (Brothers, 2008).

- **Telling a joke or two is always a good way to begin a speech:** Humor is some of the toughest material to deliver effectively because it requires an exquisite sense of timing. Nothing is worse than waiting for a laugh that does not come. Moreover, one person's joke is another person's slander. It is extremely easy to offend when using humor. The same material can play very differently with different audiences. For these reasons, it is not a good idea to start with a joke, particularly if it is not well related to your topic. Humor is just too unpredictable and difficult for many novice speakers. If you insist on using humor, make sure the "joke" is on you, not on someone else. Another tip is never to pause and wait for a laugh that may not come. If the audience catches the joke, fine. If not, you're not left standing in awkward silence waiting for a reaction.
- **Any mistake means that you have "blown it":** For instance, say you are giving a speech on healthy eating and accidentally say, "Many fruits are high in sodium" instead of potassium. You see the puzzled looks on the faces of your audience. The best way to handle this mistake is to quickly acknowledge and correct the error. "Oops, wrong mineral. I meant potassium." Then you move on, making no more reference to that mistake. If you minimize the mistake, so will the audience. Note that this correction is easily done with the extemporaneous delivery. But pivoting like this would be much harder with a speech you had memorized or were reading because you are less likely to notice the facial expressions of the audience.
- **Avoid speaking anxiety by writing your speech out word for word and memorizing it:** Memorizing your speech word for word will likely make your apprehension worse rather than better. Instead of remembering three to five main points and subpoints, you will try to commit to memory more than a thousand bits of data. If you forget a point, the only way to get back on track is to start from the beginning. You are inviting your mind to go blank by overloading it with details. In addition, audiences do not like to listen to "canned," or memorized, material. Your delivery is likely to suffer if you memorize. Audiences appreciate speakers who talk naturally to them rather than recite a written script.
- **Audiences are out to get you:** With only a few exceptions, the natural state of audiences is empathy, not antipathy. Most face-to-face audiences are interested in your material, not in your image. Watching someone who is anxious tends to make audience members anxious themselves. Particularly in public speaking classes, audiences want to see you succeed. They know that they will soon be in your shoes, and they identify with you, most likely hoping you'll succeed and give them ideas for how to make their own speeches better. If you establish direct eye contact with real individuals in your audience, you will see them respond to what you are saying, and this response lets you know that you are succeeding.
- **You will look to the audience as nervous as you feel:** Empirical research has shown that audiences do not perceive the level of nervousness that speakers report feeling (Clevenger, 1959). Most listeners judge speakers as less anxious than the speakers rate themselves. In other words, the audience is not likely to perceive the level of anxiety accurately that you might be experiencing. Some of the most effective speakers will return to their seats after their speech and exclaim that they were **so** nervous. Listeners will respond, "You didn't look nervous." Audiences do not necessarily perceive our fears. Consequently, don't apologize for your nerves. There is a good chance the audience will not notice if you do not point it out to them.
- **A little nervousness helps you give a better speech:** This "myth" is true! Professional speakers, actors, and other performers consistently rely on the heightened arousal of nervousness to channel extra energy into their performance. People would much rather listen to a speaker who is alert and enthusiastic than one who is relaxed to the point of boredom. Many professional speakers say that the day they stop feeling nervous is the day they should stop speaking in public. The goal is to control those nerves and channel them into your presentation.

Key Takeaways

- Communication apprehension refers to the fear or anxiety people experience at the thought of being evaluated by others. Some anxiety is a normal part of the communication process.
- The psychological threat individuals perceive in the communication situation prompts physiological changes designed to help the body respond. These physical reactions to stress create the uncomfortable feelings of unease called speech anxiety and may include sweaty palms, shaking, butterflies in the stomach, and dry mouth.
- A great deal of conventional advice for managing stage fright is misleading, including suggestions that speech anxiety is neurotic, that telling a joke is a good opening, that any mistake is fatal to an effective speech, that memorizing a script is useful, that audiences are out to get you, and that your audience sees how nervous you really are.

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12.2: Why Do We Get Communication Apprehension?

Types of Communication Anxiety

We have said that experiencing some form of anxiety is a normal part of the communication process. Most people are anxious about being evaluated by an audience. Interestingly, many people assume that their nervousness is an experience unique to them. They assume that other people do not feel anxious when confronting the threat of public speaking (McCroskey, 2001). Although anxiety is a widely shared response to the stress of public speaking, not all anxiety is the same. Many researchers have investigated the differences between apprehension grounded in personality characteristics and anxiety prompted by a particular situation at a particular time (Witt et. al., 2006). McCroskey argues there are four types of communication apprehension: anxiety related to trait, context, audience, and situation (McCroskey, 2001). If you understand these different types of apprehension, you can gain insight into the varied communication factors that contribute to speaking anxiety.

Trait Anxiety

Some people are just more disposed to communication apprehension than others. As Witt, Brown, Roberts, Weisel, Sawyer, and Behnke explain, **trait anxiety** measures how people *generally* feel across situations and time periods" (Witt, et. al., 2006). This means that some people feel more uncomfortable than the average person, regardless of the context, audience, or situation. It doesn't matter whether you are raising your hand in a group discussion, talking with people you meet at a party, or giving speeches in a class; you're likely to be uncomfortable in all these settings if you experience trait anxiety. While trait anxiety is not the same as shyness, those with high trait anxiety are more likely to avoid exposure to public speaking situations, so their nervousness might be compounded by lack of experience or skill (Witt et. al., 2006). People who experience trait anxiety may never like public speaking, but through preparation and practice, they can learn to give effective public speeches when they need to do so.

Context Anxiety

Context anxiety refers to anxiety prompted by specific communication contexts. Some of the major context factors that can heighten this form of anxiety are formality, uncertainty, and novelty.



Figure 12.2.1: Author Michelle Alexander appears poised and calm as she speaks from the podium at the Miller Center of Public Affairs. (CC BY 2.0; Miller Center via Wikimedia Commons)

Formality

Some individuals can be perfectly composed when talking at a meeting or in a small group, yet when faced with a more formal public speaking setting, they become intimidated and nervous or suffer from **formality anxiety**. As the formality of the communication context increases, the stakes rise, sometimes prompting greater apprehension. Unlike Michelle Alexander, some writers would have so much anxiety that they would pass up this opportunity to share their work. Certain communication contexts, such as a press conference or a courtroom, can make even the most confident individuals nervous. One reason is that these communication contexts presuppose an adversarial relationship between the speaker and some audience members.

Uncertainty

In addition, it is hard to predict and control the flow of information in such contexts, so the level of uncertainty is high, which can cause **uncertainty anxiety**. The feelings of context anxiety might be similar to those you experience on the first day of class with a new instructor: you don't know what to expect, so you are more nervous than you might be later in the semester when you know the instructor and the class routine better.

Novelty

Additionally, most of us are not experienced in high-tension communication settings. The novelty of the communication context we encounter is another factor contributing to apprehension. **Novelty anxiety** becomes more of an issue in communication environments that are new to us, even for those who are normally comfortable with speaking in public. A good example would be a courtroom. Most of us are rarely in a courthouse and even more rarely asked to speak to the judge and/or the gallery. Even a seasoned speaker may develop communication apprehension in such an unfamiliar setting.

Most people can learn through practice to cope with their anxiety prompted by formal, uncertain, and novel communication contexts. Fortunately, most public speaking classroom contexts are not adversarial. The opportunities you have to practice giving speeches reduce the novelty and uncertainty of the public speaking context, enabling most students to learn how to cope with anxiety prompted by the communication context.



Figure 12.2.2: The large, formal setting of this courtroom in Cherokee County, North Carolina, that seats at least 75 observers would create novelty anxiety in some speakers. (CC BY 4.0; Harrison Keely via Wikimedia Commons)

Audience Anxiety

For some individuals, it is not the communication context that prompts anxiety; it is the people in the audience they face. **Audience anxiety** describes communication apprehension prompted by specific audience characteristics. These characteristics include similarity, subordinate status, audience size, and familiarity.

You might have no difficulty talking to an audience of your peers in student government meetings, but an audience composed of parents and students on a campus visit might make you nervous because of the presence of parents in the audience. The degree of perceived similarity between you and your audience can influence your level of speech anxiety. We all prefer to talk to an audience that we believe shares our values more than to one that does not. The more dissimilar we are compared to our audience members, the more likely we are to be nervous. Studies have shown that subordinate status can also contribute to speaking anxiety (Witt et. al., 2006). Talking in front of your boss or teacher may be intimidating, especially if you are being evaluated. The size of the audience can also play a role: the larger the audience, the more threatening it may seem. Finally, familiarity can be a factor. Some of us prefer talking to strangers rather than to people we know well. Others feel more nervous in front of an audience of friends and family because there is more pressure to perform well.

Situational Anxiety

Situational anxiety, McCroskey explains, is the communication apprehension created by "the unique combination of influences generated by audience, time, and context" (McCroskey, 2001). Each communication event involves several dimensions: physical, temporal, social-psychological, and cultural. These dimensions combine to create a unique communication situation that is different from any previous communication event. The situation created by a given audience, in a given time, and in a given context can coalesce into situational anxiety.

Example 12.2.1 When the Situation Changes

For example, say you have become comfortable presenting your ideas at your staff meetings at work, where the setting is informal, and the group is small and familiar. But when you are presenting those same ideas at the regional company meeting where you are on a stage, facing a large, unfamiliar audience with higher professional expectations, you find your mouth is dry, and your heart is racing. All these factors and more can produce situational anxiety.

Key Takeaways

- Most people experience communication apprehension in a public speaking context, but assume this anxiety is unique to them.
- There are many reasons why speakers develop communication apprehension. Some of them are trait, context, audience, and situational anxiety.
- Context anxiety can be due to a more formal situation, a public speaking experience that has uncertainty or a setting that is novel to the speaker.

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12.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension

Properly Channeling Stage Fright

Experiencing some nervousness about public speaking is normal. The energy created by this physiological response can be functional if you harness it as a resource for more effective public speaking. In this section, we suggest a number of steps that you can take to channel your stage fright into excitement and animation. We will begin with specific speech-related considerations and then briefly examine some of the more general anxiety management options available.



Figure 12.3.1: This speaker reveals her communication apprehension by nervously pressing her thumbnail to her mouth. Since anxiety typically peaks just before speaking, she is likely the next one up. (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 Freddie Pena via Stand Up Speak Out)

Speech-Related Considerations

Communication apprehension does not necessarily remain constant throughout all the stages of speech preparation and delivery. One group of researchers studied the ebb and flow of anxiety levels at four stages in the delivery of a speech. They compared indicators of physiological stress at different milestones in the process: anticipation, confrontation, adaptation, and release.

When Do We Feel Anxious?

- **The anticipation stage:** (the minute prior to starting the speech)
- **The confrontation stage:** (the first minute of the speech)
- **The adaptation stage:** (the last minute of the speech)
- **The release stage:** (the minute immediately following the end of the speech) (Witt, et. al., 2006).

These researchers found that anxiety typically peaked at the anticipatory stage, as reflected in this speaker nervously waiting her turn. In other words, we are likely to be most anxious right before we get up to speak. As we progress through our speech, our level of anxiety is likely to decline. Planning your speech to incorporate techniques for managing your nervousness at different times will help you decrease the overall level of stress you experience. We also offer a number of suggestions for managing your reactions while you are delivering your speech.

Think Positively

As we mentioned earlier, communication apprehension begins in the mind as a psychological response. This underscores the importance of a speaker's psychological attitude toward speaking. To prepare yourself mentally for a successful speaking experience, we recommend using a technique called **cognitive restructuring**. Cognitive restructuring is simply changing how you label the physiological responses you will experience. Rather than thinking of public speaking as a dreaded obligation, make a conscious decision to consider it an exciting opportunity. The first audience member that you have to convince is yourself, by deliberately replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. If you say something to yourself often enough, you will gradually come to believe it.

We also suggest practicing what communication scholars Metcalfe, Beebe, and Beebe call **positive self-talk** rather than **negative self-talk** (Metcalfe, 1994; Beebe, 2000). If you find yourself thinking, "I'm going to forget everything when I get to the front of the room," turn that negative message around to a positive one. Tell yourself, "I have notes to remind me what comes next, and the audience won't know if I don't cover everything in the order I planned." The idea is to dispute your negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones, even if you think you are "conning" yourself. By monitoring how you talk about yourself, you can unlearn old patterns and change the ways you think about things that produce anxiety.



Figure 12.3.2: Da'Shon Carr, LBJ School of Public Affairs student, confidently introduces the speaker. (Public Domain; LBJ Library via Wikimedia Commons)

Reducing Anxiety through Preparation

As we said earlier, uncertainty makes for greater anxiety. Nothing is more frightening than facing the unknown. Although no one can see into the future and predict everything that will happen during a speech, every speaker can and should prepare so that the "unknowns" of the speech event are kept to a minimum. You can do this by gaining as much knowledge as possible about whom you will be addressing, what you will say, how you will say it, and where the speech will take place. This student in Figure 12.3.2 was given the opportunity to introduce the main speaker. Though short, her time on stage was important, and anxiety could have negatively affected her performance. But through careful and thorough preparation, she gives a strong introduction.

Analyze Your Audience

The audience that we imagine in our minds is almost always more threatening than the reality of the people sitting in front of us. The more information you have about the characteristics of your audience, the more you will be able to craft an effective message. Since your stage fright is likely to be at its highest at the beginning of your speech, it is helpful to open the speech with a technique to prompt an audience response. You might try posing a question, asking for a show of hands, or sharing a story that you know is relevant to your listeners' experience. When you see the audience responding to you by nodding, smiling, or answering questions, you will have directed the focus of attention from yourself to the audience. Such responses indicate success; they are positively reinforcing and thus reduce your nervousness.

Clearly Organize Your Ideas

Being prepared as a speaker means knowing the main points of your message so well that you can remember them even when you are feeling highly anxious, and the best way to learn those points is to create an outline for your speech. With a clear outline to follow, you will find it much easier to move from one point to the next without stumbling or getting lost.

A note of caution is in order: you do not want to react to the stress of speaking by writing and memorizing a manuscript. Your audience will usually be able to tell that you wrote your speech out verbatim, and they will tune out very quickly. You are setting yourself up for disaster if you try to memorize a written text because the pressure of having to remember all those particulars will be tremendous. Moreover, if you have a momentary memory lapse during a memorized speech, you may have a lot of trouble continuing without starting over at the beginning.

What you do want to prepare is a simple outline that reminds you of the progression of ideas in your speech. What is important is the order of your points, not the specifics of each sentence. It is perfectly fine if your speech varies in terms of specific language or examples each time you practice it.

It may be a good idea to reinforce this organization through visual aids. When it comes to managing anxiety, visual aids have the added benefit of taking attention off the speaker.

Adapt Your Language to the Oral Mode

Another reason not to write out your speech as a manuscript is that to speak effectively, you want your language to be adapted to the oral, not the written, mode. You will find your speaking anxiety more manageable if you speak in the oral mode because it will help you to feel like you are having a conversation with friends rather than delivering a formal proclamation.

Appropriate oral style is more concrete and vivid than the written style. Effective speaking relies on verbs rather than nouns, and the language is less complex. Long sentences may work well for novelists such as William Faulkner or James Joyce, where readers can go back and reread passages two, three, or even seven or eight times. Your listeners, though, cannot “rewind” you in order to catch ideas they miss the first time through.

Don’t be afraid to use personal pronouns freely, frequently saying “I” and “me”—or better yet, “us” and “we.” Personal pronouns are much more effective in speaking than language constructions, such as the following “this author,” because they help you to build a connection with your audience. Another oral technique is to build audience questions into your speech. Rhetorical questions, questions that do not require a verbal answer, invite the audience to participate with your material by thinking about the implications of the question and how it might be answered. If you are graphic and concrete in your language selection, your audience is more likely to listen attentively. You will be able to see the audience listening, and this feedback will help to reduce your anxiety.

Practice in Conditions Similar to Speech Setting

It is not enough to practice your speech silently in your head. To reduce anxiety and increase the likelihood of a successful performance, you need to practice out loud in a situation similar to the one you will face when actually performing your speech. Practice delivering your speech aloud while standing. If you make a mistake, do not stop to correct it, but continue all the way through your speech; that is what you will have to do when you are in front of the audience.

If possible, practice in the actual room where you will be giving your speech. Not only will you have a better sense of what it will feel like to actually speak, but you may also have the chance to practice using presentation aids and potentially avoid distractions and glitches like incompatible computers, blown projector bulbs, or sunlight glaring in your eyes. Some speech settings, like an auditorium venue, may be more difficult to gain access to before speech day. But do your best to practice at least part of the time in a space similar to the one for your presentation.



Figure 12.3.3: This audience in a crowded auditorium uses the opportunity to network with fellow attendees as they wait for the speaker to begin at a TEDxBoston event. (CC BY 2.0; Juhan Sonin via Wikimedia Commons)

Three very useful tools for anxiety-reducing practice are a timer, a mirror, and a recording device like your phone. Use the timer to time your speech, keeping in mind that most novice speakers speak too fast, not too slowly. By ensuring that you are within the time guidelines, you will eliminate the embarrassment of having to cut your remarks short because you've run out of time or of not having enough to say to fulfill the assignment. Use the mirror and/or record yourself to gauge how well you maintain eye contact with your audience; this will help you check that you are looking up from your notes. It will also help you build the habit of using appropriate facial expressions to convey the emotions in your speech. While you might feel a little absurd practicing your speech out loud in front of a mirror or recording yourself giving a speech to your living room furniture, the practice that you do before your speech can make you much less anxious when it comes time to face the audience.

Watch What You Eat

A final tip about preparation is to watch what you eat immediately before speaking. The butterflies in your stomach are likely to be more noticeable if you skip normal meals. While you should eat normally, you should avoid caffeinated drinks because they can make your shaking hands worse. Carbohydrates operate as natural sedatives, so you may want to eat carbohydrates to help slow down your metabolism and to avoid fried or very spicy foods that may upset your stomach. Especially if you are speaking in the morning, be sure to have breakfast. If you haven't had anything to eat or drink since dinner the night before, dizziness and light-headedness are very real possibilities.

Reducing Nervousness during Delivery

There are a number of steps you can take to counteract the negative physiological effects of stress on the body.

Anticipate the Reactions of Your Body

Deep breathing will help to counteract the effects of excess adrenaline. You can place symbols in your notes, like "slow down" or ☺, that remind you to pause and breathe during points in your speech. It is also a good idea to pause a moment before you get started to set an appropriate pace from the onset. Look at your audience and smile. It is a reflex for some of your audience members to smile back. Those smiles will reassure you that your audience members are friendly.

Physical movement helps to channel some of the excess energy that your body produces in response to anxiety. If at all possible, move around the front of the room rather than remaining imprisoned behind the lectern or gripping it for dear life (avoid pacing nervously from side to side, however). Move closer to the audience and then stop for a moment. If you are afraid that moving away from the lectern will reveal your shaking hands, avoid using a sheet of paper for your notes, since quivering hands are more noticeable.

Vocal warm-ups are also important before speaking. Just as athletes warm up before practice or competition and musicians warm up before playing, speakers need to get their voices ready to speak. Talking with others before your speech or quietly humming to yourself can get your voice ready for your presentation. You can even sing or practice a bit of your speech out loud while you're in the shower (just don't wake the neighbors), where the warm, moist air is beneficial for your vocal mechanism.

Gently yawning a few times is also an excellent way to stretch the key muscle groups involved in speaking.

Immediately before you speak, you can relax the muscles in your neck and shoulders by gently rolling your head from side to side. Allow your arms to hang down your sides and stretch out your shoulders. **Isometric exercises** that involve momentarily tensing and then relaxing specific muscle groups are an effective way to keep your muscles from becoming stiff.

Focus on the Audience, Not on Yourself

During your speech, make a point of establishing direct eye contact with your audience members. By looking at individuals, you establish a series of one-to-one contacts similar to interpersonal communication. An audience becomes much less threatening when you think of them not as an anonymous mass but as a collection of individuals. You can also focus on the important message you have for the audience, too important for them to be distracted by your nervousness.

Maintain Your Sense of Humor

No matter how well we plan, unexpected things happen. That fact is what makes the public speaking situation so interesting. When the unexpected happens to you, do not let it rattle you. Say you are giving a speech to a large audience, and your mic cuts out. Don't panic. Say something like "Well, I guess I'll have to use my 'outdoor' voice." You'll get some chuckles from your audience, and your speech continues. Again, the key is to acknowledge the incident (if it's apparent to the audience) and minimize it. If you communicate that you see this tech failure as no big deal, so will they.

Even the most prepared, confident public speaker may encounter unexpected challenges during the speech. Let's discuss some common unexpected events and address some general strategies for combating the unexpected when you encounter it in your own speaking. And it's worth noting that these techniques are possible with an extemporaneous delivery, but very difficult with a memorized or manuscript (read) speech.

Plan for the Unexpected

Nearly every experienced speaker has gotten to the middle of a presentation and realized that a key section in their notes is missing or that they skipped important information from the beginning of the speech. When encountering these difficulties, a good strategy is to pause for a moment to think through what you want to do next. Is it important to include the missing information, or can it be omitted without hurting the audience's ability to understand the rest of your speech? If it needs to be included, do you want to add the information now, or will it fit better later in the speech? It is often difficult to remain silent when you encounter this situation, but pausing for a few seconds will help you to figure out what to do and may be less distracting to the audience than sputtering through a few "ums" and "uhs."

Technical Difficulties

Technology has become a very useful aid in public speaking, allowing us to use audio or video clips, presentation software, or direct links to websites. However, one of the best-known truisms about technology is that it does break down. Web servers go offline, files will not download in a timely manner, your laptop dies, you forgot your charging cord, and the media are incompatible with the computer in the presentation room. It is important to always have a backup plan, decided in advance, in case of technical difficulties with your presentation materials. As you develop your speech and visual aids, think through what you will do if you cannot show a particular graph or if your presentation slides are hopelessly garbled. Although your beautifully prepared chart may be superior to the oral description you can provide, your ability to provide a succinct oral description when technology fails can give your audience the information they need.

External Distractions

Although many public speaking instructors directly address audience etiquette during speeches, you're still likely to encounter an audience member who walks in late, a ringing cell phone, or even a car alarm going off outside your classroom. If you are distracted by external events like these, it is often useful, and sometimes necessary (as in the case of the loud car alarm), to pause and wait so that you can regain the audience's attention and be heard.

Whatever the unexpected event, your most important job as a speaker is to maintain your composure. It is important not to get upset or angry because of these types of glitches—and, once again, the key to this is being fully prepared. If you keep your cool

and quickly implement a “plan B” for moving forward with your speech, your audience is likely to be impressed and may listen even more attentively to the rest of your presentation.



Figure 12.3.4: Confident and poised speaker Jemma King reinforces her credibility with her demeanor as she speaks on stage at the Defense Leadership Summit. (ShareAlike 4.0; Liam Mahoney via Wikimedia Commons)

Stress Management Techniques

Even when we employ positive thinking and are well prepared, some of us still feel a great deal of anxiety about public speaking. When that is the case, it can be more helpful to use stress management than to try to make the anxiety go away.

One general technique for managing stress is **positive visualization**. Visualization is the process of seeing something in your mind’s eye; essentially, it is a form of self-hypnosis. Frequently used in sports training, positive visualization involves using the imagination to create images of relaxation or ultimate success. Essentially, you imagine in great detail the goal for which you are striving, say, a rousing round of applause after you give your speech. You mentally picture yourself standing at the front of the room, delivering your introduction, confident as the speaker in Figure 12.3.4, moving through the body of your speech, highlighting your presentation aids, and sharing a memorable conclusion. If you imagine a positive outcome, your body will respond to it as if it were real. Such mind-body techniques create the psychological grounds for us to achieve the goals we have imagined. As we discussed earlier, communication apprehension has a psychological basis, so mind-body techniques such as visualization can be important in reducing anxiety. It’s important to keep in mind, though, that visualization does not mean you can skip practicing your speech out loud. Just as an athlete still needs to work out and practice the sport, you need to practice your speech in order to achieve the positive results you visualize.

The success of techniques such as these clearly indicates that increased exposure to public speaking reduces overall anxiety. Consequently, you should seek out opportunities to speak in public rather than avoid them. As the famous political orator William Jennings Bryan once noted, “The ability to speak effectively is an acquirement rather than a gift” (Carnegie, 1955).

Key Takeaways

- There are many steps you can take during the speech preparation process to manage your communication apprehension, including thinking positively, analyzing your audience, clearly organizing your ideas, adapting your language to the oral mode, and practicing.
- You can employ a variety of techniques while you are speaking to reduce your apprehension, such as anticipating your body’s reactions, focusing on the audience, and maintaining your sense of humor.
- Plan ahead for how to cope with unexpected difficulties such as forgetting part of your speech content, having technical trouble with visual aids, or being interrupted by external distractions.
- Stress management techniques such as positive visualization, can also be helpful.

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12.4: Four Methods of Delivery

Each Method Has Value

There are four methods of delivering a speech: impromptu, extemporaneous, manuscript, and memorized. Impromptu is spontaneous but often disorganized, while extemporaneous requires preparation and promotes audience engagement. Manuscript ensures accuracy but may lack natural connection, and memorized allows freedom of expression but can feel flat if not well-executed. While the extemporaneous delivery is best in most everyday speaking situations because of its flexibility, each method has unique strengths and weaknesses depending on the situation, and understanding when and how to apply each style is essential for developing effective, confident, and adaptable public speaking skills across a variety of communication contexts.



Figure 12.4.1: Speaking at her commencement, this student, honored as an outstanding graduate, doubtless carefully chose and practiced her delivery until she had a strong speech. (CC BY 2.0; COD Newsroom via Wikimedia Commons)

The easiest approach to speech delivery is not always the best. This student speaker doubtless spent many hours preparing for such an important occasion. Substantial work goes into the careful preparation of an interesting and ethical message, so it is understandable that students may have the impulse to avoid “messing it up” by simply reading it word for word. But students who do this miss out on one of the major reasons for studying public speaking: to learn ways to “connect” with one’s audience and to increase one’s confidence in doing so. You already know how to read, and you already know how to talk. But public speaking is neither reading nor talking.

Speaking in public has more formality than talking. During a speech, you should present yourself professionally. This doesn’t mean you must dress professionally (unless your instructor asks you to), but it does mean making yourself presentable by being well-groomed and wearing clean, appropriate clothes. It also means being prepared to use language correctly and appropriately for the audience and the topic, to make eye contact with your audience, and to look like you know your topic very well.

While speaking has more formality than talking, it has less formality than reading. Speaking allows for meaningful pauses, eye contact, small changes in word order, and vocal emphasis. Reading is a more or less exact replication of words on paper without the use of any nonverbal interpretation. Speaking, as you will realize if you think about excellent speakers you have seen and heard, provides a more animated message.

The next sections introduce four methods of delivery that can help you balance between too much and too little formality when giving a public speech.

Impromptu Speaking

An **impromptu delivery** is used in the presentation of a short message without advance preparation. Impromptu speeches often occur when someone is asked to “say a few words” or give a toast on a special occasion. You have probably done impromptu speaking many times in informal, conversational settings. Self-introductions in group settings are examples of impromptu speaking: “Hi, my name is Steve, and I’m a volunteer with the Homes for the Brave program.” Another example of impromptu speaking occurs when you answer a question such as, “What did you think of the documentary?”

The advantage of this kind of speaking is that it’s spontaneous and responsive in an animated group context. The disadvantage is that the speaker is given little or no time to contemplate the central theme of their message. As a result, the message may be disorganized and difficult for listeners to follow.

In the Moment

Impromptu Speech Guide

- Take a moment to collect your thoughts and plan the main point you want to make.
- Thank the person for inviting you to speak.
- Deliver your message, making your main point as briefly as you can while still covering it adequately and at a pace your listeners can follow.
- Thank the person again for the opportunity to speak.
- Stop talking.

Impromptu speeches are generally most successful when brief and focused on a single point.

Extemporaneous Speaking

The presentation of a carefully planned and rehearsed speech uses an **extemporaneous delivery** which is when the speech is presented in a conversational manner using brief notes. By using notes rather than a full manuscript, the extemporaneous speaker can establish and maintain eye contact with the audience and assess how well they are understanding the speech as it progresses. The opportunity to assess is also an opportunity to restate more clearly any idea or concept that the audience seems to have trouble grasping.

Example 12.4.1 Reacting to Nonverbal Feedback

For instance, suppose you are speaking about workplace safety, and you use the term “sleep deprivation.” If you notice your audience’s eyes glazing over, this might not be a result of their own sleep deprivation, but rather an indication of their uncertainty about what you mean. If this happens, you can add a short explanation; for example, “sleep deprivation is sleep loss serious enough to threaten one’s cognition, hand-to-eye coordination, judgment, and emotional health.” You might also (or instead) provide a concrete example to illustrate the idea. Then you can resume your message, having clarified an important concept.

Speaking extemporaneously has some advantages. It promotes the likelihood that you, the speaker, will be perceived as knowledgeable and credible. In addition, your audience is likely to pay better attention to the message because it is engaging both verbally and nonverbally. The disadvantage of extemporaneous speaking is that it requires a great deal of preparation for both the verbal and the nonverbal components of the speech. Adequate preparation cannot be achieved the day before you’re scheduled to speak.

Because extemporaneous speaking is the style used in the great majority of public speaking situations, most of the information in this chapter is targeted to this kind of speaking. For instance, even if you typically don't give presentations at work, you may want to give a demonstration speech to share a favorite hobby or skill with others. A speaker giving a demonstration speech would find it difficult to give a manuscript delivery by reading their speech word for word and so needs to rely on the extemporaneous delivery to get their message across.



Figure 12.4.2: Suny Stanfield, student at the Southwest Institute of Chinese Martial Arts, Lawton, Oklahoma, demonstrates how to use a modern Wushu steel whip chain while she gives her speech extemporaneously at the Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebration. She would not be able to present this kind of speech if she were reading her notes. (Public Domain; U.S. Air Force Photo by Senior Airman Jesse Lopez via Wikimedia Commons)

Speaking from a Manuscript

A **manuscript delivery** is when the speaker gives a word-for-word iteration of a written message. In a manuscript speech, the speaker maintains their attention on the printed page except when using visual aids.

The advantage of reading from a manuscript is the exact repetition of the original words. As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in some circumstances, this can be extremely important. For example, reading a statement about your organization's legal responsibilities to customers may require that the original words be exact. In reading one word at a time, in order, the only errors would typically be mispronunciation of a word or stumbling over complex sentence structure.

However, there are costs involved in manuscript speaking. First, it's typically an uninteresting way to present. Unless the speaker has rehearsed the reading as a complete performance animated with vocal expression and gestures (as poets do in a poetry slam and actors do in a reader's theater), the presentation tends to be dull. Keeping one's eyes glued to the script precludes eye contact with the audience, which means the audience is less engaged and the speaker can't respond to nonverbal feedback from the audience. For this kind of "straight" manuscript speech to hold the audience's attention, the audience must be already interested in the message before the delivery begins.

It is worth noting that professional speakers, actors, news reporters, and politicians often read from an autocue device, such as a TelePrompTer, especially when appearing on television, where eye contact with the camera is crucial. With practice, a speaker can achieve a conversational tone and give the impression of speaking extemporaneously while using an autocue device. However, success in this medium depends on two factors: (1) the speaker is already an accomplished public speaker who has learned to use a conversational tone while delivering a prepared script, and (2) the speech is written in a style that sounds conversational.

Speaking from Memory

A speaker giving a **memorized delivery** is the rote recitation of a written message that the speaker has committed to memory. Actors, of course, recite from memory whenever they perform from a script in a stage play, television program, or movie scene. When it comes to speeches, memorization can be useful when the message needs to be exact, and the speaker doesn't want to be confined by notes.

The advantage of memorization is that it enables the speaker to maintain eye contact with the audience throughout the speech. Being free of notes means that you can move freely around the stage and use your hands to make gestures. If your speech uses visual aids, this freedom is even more of an advantage. However, there are some real and potential costs. First, unless

you also plan and memorize every vocal cue (the subtle but meaningful variations in speech delivery, which can include the use of pitch, tone, volume, and pace), gesture, and facial expression, your presentation will be flat and uninteresting, and even the most fascinating topic will suffer. You might end up speaking in a monotone or a sing-song repetitive delivery pattern. You might also present your speech in a rapid “machine-gun” style that fails to emphasize the most important points. Second, if you lose your place and start trying to ad lib, the contrast in your style of delivery will alert your audience that something is wrong. More frighteningly, if you go completely blank during the presentation, it will be extremely difficult to find your place and keep going.

Key Takeaways

- There are four main kinds of speech delivery: impromptu, extemporaneous, manuscript, and memorized.
- Impromptu speaking involves delivering a message on the spur of the moment, as when someone is asked to “say a few words.”
- Extemporaneous speaking consists of delivering a speech in a conversational fashion using notes. This is the style most speeches call for.
- Manuscript speaking consists of reading a fully scripted speech. It is useful when a message needs to be delivered in precise words.
- Memorized speaking consists of reciting a scripted speech from memory. Memorization allows the speaker to be free of notes.

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12.5: Speaking Contexts that Affect Delivery

Consider the Speech Setting

The setting for a speech shapes how messages are delivered and received. Every day, speakers encounter a variety of contexts, from informal classroom lectures to giving a speech to hundreds from an auditorium stage to the challenges of an outdoor venue. For instance, when Peter Mokaya Tabichi, the winner of the 2019 Global Teacher Prize, gives his speech, he needs to balance the formality of the occasion with the age of much of his audience, as pictured in Figure 12.5.1. And now giving presentations via video conferencing platforms like Zoom presents a whole new set of variables to consider. Each setting presents unique challenges, including microphone use, physical space, and managing distractions. Adapting delivery to fit the context helps speakers connect effectively and present with confidence.



Figure 12.5.1: The person giving a formal speech to this large crowd needs to adapt his message since many in the audience are children. (CC BY 2.0; DFID-UK Department for International Development via Wikimedia Commons)

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at a gigantic civil rights rally on an August afternoon in 1963. His lectern was bristling with microphones placed there for news coverage and for recording the historic event. His audience, estimated to number a quarter of a million people, extended as far as the eye could see. He was the last speaker of the day, delivering his speech after more than a dozen civil rights leaders and world-famous performers such as Joan Baez, Mahalia Jackson, and Charlton Heston had occupied the stage (Ross, 2007). King gave us his speech in the assertive, ringing tones of inspired vision. Nothing less would have worked that day.

Most of us will never speak to so many people at once. Even a television appearance will probably command a much smaller audience than the crowd that heard King’s speech. Even though you don’t expect an audience of such size or a setting of such symbolic importance, you should still be prepared to adapt to the setting in which you will speak.

Our audiences, circumstances, and physical contexts for public speaking will vary. At some point in your life, you may run for public office or rise to a leadership role in a business or volunteer organization. Or you may be responsible for informing coworkers about a new policy, regulation, or opportunity. You may be asked to deliver remarks in the context of a worship service, wedding, or funeral. You may be asked to introduce a keynote speaker or simply to make an important announcement in some context. Sometimes you will speak in a familiar environment, while at other times you may be faced with an unfamiliar location and very little time to get used to speaking with a microphone. These are contexts and situations we address in the following subsections.

Using Lecterns

A **lectern** is a small raised surface, usually with a slanted top, where a speaker can place notes during a speech. While a lectern adds a measure of formality to the speaking situation, it allows speakers the freedom to do two things: to come out from behind the lectern to establish more immediate contact with the audience and to use both hands for gestures.

However, for new speakers who feel anxious, it is all too tempting to grip the edges of the lectern with both hands for security. You might even wish you could hide behind it. Be aware of these temptations so you can manage them effectively and present yourself to your audience in a manner they will perceive as confident. One way to achieve this is to limit your use of the lectern to simply a place to rest your notes, whether in the form of index cards, paper, or your laptop or tablet. Try stepping to the side or front of the lectern when speaking with free hands, only occasionally standing at the lectern to consult your notes. This will enhance your eye contact as well as free up your hands for gesturing.

Speaking in a Small or Large Physical Space

If you are accustomed to being in a classroom of a certain size, you will need to consider the **physical space** of your speaking venue, and make adjustments when speaking in a smaller or larger space than what you are used to.

A large auditorium can be intimidating, especially for speakers who feel shy and “exposed” when facing an audience. However, the maxim that “proper preparation prevents poor performance” is just as true here as anywhere. If you have prepared and practiced well, you can approach a large-venue speaking engagement with confidence. In terms of practical adjustments, be aware that your voice is likely to echo, so you will want to speak more slowly than usual and make use of pauses to mark the ends of phrases and sentences. Similarly, your facial expressions and gestures should be larger so that they are visible from farther away. If you are using visual aids, they need to be large enough to be visible from the back of the auditorium.

Limited space is not as disconcerting for most speakers as enormous space, and it has the advantage of minimizing the tendency to pace back and forth while you speak. We have all seen dramatic soliloquies in the movies and plays where an actor makes use of the space on the stage, but this is generally not a good strategy for a speech. A small space also calls for more careful management of notes and visual aids, as your audience will be able to see up close what you are doing with your hands. Do your best to minimize fumbling, including setting up in advance or arriving early to decide how to organize your materials in the physical space.

Speaking Outdoors

Outdoor settings can be charming, but they are prone to distractions. If you’re giving a speech in a picturesque setting, it may be difficult to maintain the audience’s attention. If you know this ahead of time, you might plan your speech to focus more on mood than information and perhaps to make reference to the lovely view.

More typically, outdoor speech venues can pose challenges with weather, sun glare, and uninvited guests, such as ants and pigeons. If the venue is located near a busy highway, it might be difficult to make yourself heard over the ambient noise. You might lack the usual accommodations, such as a lectern or table. Whatever the situation, you will need to use your best efforts to project your voice clearly without sounding like you’re yelling. In Figure 12.5.2, this speaker doesn't need to yell since his small audience of students is gathered around his display table, but he needs to keep in mind many other variables when giving a talk outdoors. And don't assume because you have an office job, you won't ever be in this situation. Off-site work functions such as company picnics, retreats, or conferences could mean you need to give a presentation outside. And if you are a volunteer docent at this park, you might be up next on the program.



Figure 12.5.2: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers park ranger Gary Basile demonstrates the value of wetlands to students from Maple Elementary School at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center in Carmichael, Calif. (Public Domain; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Sacramento District via Wikimedia Commons)

Using a Microphone

Most people today are familiar with microphones that are built into phones, video recorders, and other electronic devices, but they may be new at using a **microphone** to deliver a speech. One overall principle to remember is that a microphone only amplifies; it does not clarify. If you are not enunciating clearly, the microphone will merely enable your audience to hear amplified mumbling.

Microphones come in a wide range of styles and sizes. Generally, the easiest microphone to use is the clip-on style worn on the front of your shirt. If you look closely at many television personalities and news anchors, you will notice these tiny microphones clipped to their clothing. They require very little adaptation. You simply have to avoid looking down—at your notes, for instance—because your voice will be amplified when you do so.

Lecterns and handheld microphones require more adaptation. If they're too close to your mouth, they can screech. If they're too far away, they might not pick up your voice. Some microphones are directional, meaning that they are only effective when you speak directly into them. If there is any opportunity to do so, ask for tips about how to use a particular microphone and practice with it for a few minutes while you have someone listen from a middle row in the audience and signal whether you can be heard well. The best plan, of course, would be to have access to the microphone for practice ahead of the speaking date.

Often, a microphone is provided when it isn't necessary. If the room is small or the audience is close to you, do not feel obligated to use the microphone. Sometimes an amplified voice can feel less natural and less compelling than a direct voice. However, if you forgo the microphone, make sure to speak loudly enough for all audience members to hear you—not just those in front.

Presenting Online

Speaking on **videoconferencing** platforms such as Zoom offers both advantages and challenges for public speakers. On the positive side, virtual presentations expand access to audiences across locations and allow speakers to use visual aids easily. Someone can present their ideas to clients halfway around the world without leaving their desk, thanks to videoconferencing platforms like Zoom.



Figure 12.5.3: Videoconference meetings have become commonplace. Presenting online has benefits, but there are also challenges. (CC BY-SA 4.0; VideoPlasty via Wikimedia Commons)

However, giving a presentation online also presents obstacles, including unstable internet, limited nonverbal feedback, and potential distractions. With a presentation depending so completely on technology, the speaker must prepare for every eventuality and have a backup plan. Laptops die, slides don't load, and audience members can't access the session. By testing the technology ahead of time and having a solution for whatever arises, you're more confident of a successful presentation and can focus on your message. To ensure that your audience sees and hears the message you intended, also be sure to record yourself during practice sessions so that you know what lighting, sound, and backdrop work best for your presentation. And just because you're online doesn't mean you can forget about a dynamic delivery. Perhaps even more important than in person, a speaker presenting online needs to have strong eye contact and an energetic delivery appropriate to the subject in order to keep your audience engaged.

Audience Size

Consider your **audience size** as you decide how to present your speech. A small audience is an opportunity for a more intimate, minimally formal tone. If your audience has only 8 to 12 people, you can achieve greater audience engagement. Make use of all the preparation you have done. You do not have to revamp your speech just because the audience is small. When the presentation is over, there will most likely be opportunities to answer questions and have individual contact with your listeners.

Your classroom audience may be as many as twenty to thirty students. The format for an audience of this size is still formal but conversational. Depending on how your instructor structures the class, you may or may not be asked to leave time after your speech for questions and answers.

Some audiences are much larger. If you have an audience that fills an auditorium, or if you have an auditorium with only a few people in it, you still have a clearly formal task, and you should be guided as much as possible by your preparation.

Key Takeaways

- The physical context of a speech, whether that be indoors, outdoors, or online, shapes delivery choices, audience engagement, and the speaker's overall effectiveness.
- Effective speakers adapt to audience size, using conversational tones for smaller groups and projecting confidently with vocal variety and gestures in larger venues.
- Tools such as lecterns, microphones, and visual aids can support delivery, but speakers must manage them skillfully to avoid dependence or distraction.
- Presenting through videoconferencing requires careful preparation, including testing technology, optimizing visuals and sound, and maintaining energetic delivery to engage remote audiences.

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12.6: Using Notes Effectively

Preparing Your Speech Notes

Speaking in front of a group can be stressful for many people. But like anything, from improving your tennis game to learning a new language, practicing and being prepared will increase the likelihood of success. And so it is with public speaking. Picking the right note method, practicing your speech with your notes, and being prepared on speech day are going to make a successful speech more likely. And knowing success is likely will probably reduce stress before and during your speech. That reduced stress, in turn, can improve your performance.

Choosing the Note Method That's Right for You

- Review the different note methods below: note cards, paper, laptop, tablet, slides, or phone. Each method has its pros and cons.
- Consider the speaking context. Remember that different circumstances often call for different note methods.
- Avoid writing complete sentences in your notes. This will force you to practice the conversational style of the extemporaneous delivery rather than read your speech.
- Practice with a couple of different methods.
- Pick the one that gives you the most confidence and enables you to give the best delivery.
- Practice your speech using the method you will use in your actual speech.

Note Cards

What are the pros?

Note cards are not subject to technology issues and allow you to have only a small piece of information in front of you at any given time. Note cards are best used when you want to move around and not stay at the lectern. Note cards also make it easier to give lots of eye contact to the audience. You can also personalize your notes with colors, symbols, and/or phrases that will help you in your delivery. Such as reminders to “slow down,” “speak up,” or highlight the transitions.

What are the cons?

However, creating effective note cards takes time. Also, you may make so many revisions that you need to rewrite them. If you do so, be sure to practice a few times with the final version. You can also get note cards out of order, so you should at least number your cards and only write on one side. Some speakers like to staple them together or hold them together with a ring. The size and color are up to you, though you should write large and in dark ink so you can easily see the information at a glance. Just be sure the cards work for you and are a minimal distraction to the audience. As with any hard-copy method, if you have a last-minute change or addition, you may have to awkwardly squeeze it in.

Paper

What are the pros?

Using full sheet **paper notes** for your speech notes is often helpful if you have a long speech (i.e., 20 minutes plus) and are at the lectern the entire time. While typically not allowed in a speech course, you may have occasion in the future to give a manuscript speech (i.e., reading your speech) because the occasion demands exact wording over extemporaneous delivery. Using full sheets of paper can often work well for this type of delivery.

What are the cons?

However, it is easy to lose your place, especially if you don’t leave spaces between small chunks of information. As with note cards, you can write on one side and number your pages to avoid losing your place. Also, nervous speakers may make distracting

noise by crinkling or folding the paper. Away from the lectern, a full piece of paper can also be distracting to the audience unless the speaker has practiced a lot and only briefly looks at the paper and holds it low most of the time.

Laptop

What are the pros?

Laptop notes are often a useful method for notes. It is versatile in that you can change your notes quickly and easily. Also, it is a nice, large surface like the paper method.

What are the cons?

As with the paper method, it is easy to lose your place on a laptop if you don't leave spaces between small chunks of information. Unlike the paper method, you can't see all of your notes at once, so you have to practice glancing at whatever method your document has to indicate where you are in the document. So it may be difficult to see how much of your speech you've completed, which can be an issue if you have a strict time limitation. Also, you need a backup plan if your laptop doesn't work or you can't access your notes.



Figure 12.6.1: Laptop or written notes? This speaker might be considering preparing both. An important decision for a speaker is not only choosing the right note method but also having a backup plan for failed technology. (CC BY 2.0; Peter O'Shea via Wikimedia Commons)

Tablet

What are the pros?

Tablet notes have many of the benefits of the laptop. And a small tablet also has many of the advantages of the note cards in that you can hold it up, and it won't be as distracting as a piece of paper.

What are the cons?

A tablet also has many of the disadvantages of a laptop, such as needing to scroll and not seeing all your notes at once. Also, as with any technology, be sure to have a backup plan.

Presentation Slides

What are the pros?

One advantage of using **presentation slide notes** is that you don't have to worry about getting your notes out of order. Many

slide programs offer "speaker notes" on your laptop screen that the audience can't see. And like any technology, your notes can be easily changed. But be careful that those speaker notes are not your speech word for word. Otherwise, you will read your speech. But if you know your subject well, even without speaker notes, the few words and images on your slides can be enough to remind you of your next point. A good example of such a situation is the TED Talk speaker in Figure 12.6.2, who has no text on the slide behind him. Speakers are invited to those events as subject-matter experts. Since he knows his subject well, it's not surprising that he doesn't need text on his slide to remind him of his next point.

What are the cons?

Slides, like any technology, may fail you if they won't load. So have a backup plan. If your only notes are the "speaker notes" on your laptop screen, you have to leave your notes to walk up to the projected image to clarify or emphasize a point. Remember, you want little or no text on your slides so your audience is listening to you, not reading your slides. Plus, reading the text on your slides has the same disadvantages as reading off your notes in any other form: your voice becomes flat, you have no eye contact with your audience, and you can't see their nonverbal reaction. In fact, your audience may wonder why you didn't just email the slides and save them the time and energy to attend this speech. But very little text can also mean your slide isn't enough to remind you of the next point.



Figure 12.6.2: Paolo Petrocelli on stage at TEDxRoma using a slide of a large, historic building behind him to reinforce his point. (CC BY-SA 4.0; DiploCult via Wikimedia Commons)

Your Phone

What are the pros?

Phone notes are probably the easiest way to create notes. You can do it anywhere, and even a large phone is about the size of an index card, so it has the benefits of minimal distraction to the audience. It also has the same benefits as a laptop and tablet.

What are the cons?

Your phone also has the disadvantages of a laptop or tablet. Again, you need to scroll. You can't see all of your notes at once, and in case technology fails, you need a backup plan. In addition, because it is a smaller screen, more practice is needed for a smooth delivery. You do not want to stop for several seconds throughout your speech as you advance your screen or search for your place.

No matter what note method you use, considering the pros and cons of each method will help you create notes that will enable you to give an effective extemporaneous delivery.

Creating Good Notes

- Identify keywords that will help you recall major points and supporting details.
- Select words or phrases that remind you of what you need to say next.
- Revise and refine your notes as you practice your speech, rewriting when necessary.
- Write/type in large, bold letters with plenty of white space so you can see key information at a glance.
- Practice repeatedly with the note method you've chosen and any visual aids you plan to use.
- Anticipate possible problems with your notes by practicing and having a backup plan.

What About Presenting a Speech via Videoconferencing?

What is the best note method for a presentation on Zoom or some other videoconferencing platform? Any of the note methods listed here could work well. Here's what you need to keep in mind when using your **videoconference notes.**

Eye Contact

You need eye contact with your audience on Zoom, just like you do with an in-person speech. Use the note method that most easily allows you to give your audience plenty of eye contact and a fluid, extemporaneous delivery.

Notes in Front

Whatever method you use, be sure that your notes are in front of you, either at eye level or just below. Eye movement slightly down at times looks natural. But if your notes are on a screen to the side, that eye movement will be much more obvious.

Record Yourself During Your Practice Time

Unlike an in-person speech, with videoconferencing, you can get a preview of your performance by recording yourself and playing it back. This is an excellent method to determine if your delivery, tone, facial expressions, and body language reinforce your message.

Look at the Right Screen

If you are using multiple screens, be sure you face the one that will give you eye contact with your audience. If you are unsure, recording yourself will give you the answer.

Be Aware of Your Mic

On Zoom, the audience typically can't see your notes. So you don't need to worry about bright colors or the size of your notes distracting your audience. But be aware that minor sounds near your microphone can sound quite loud to your audience, another reason to record a practice speech.

Time to Practice Your Extemporaneous Delivery

Many new speakers underestimate the importance of practicing their speech. This step is essential to an effective speech. The added benefit is that practicing your speech is likely to reduce your communication apprehension before and during your speech.

Become Comfortable with Your Notes.

In order to be comfortable with your notes, you need to practice with them.

Try This 12.6.1 Make the Notes Work for You

- Choose the note method you will use for this speech and transfer it into note form.
- Speak out loud so you can hear yourself speak.
- Once you have practiced a few times, you will no longer stumble over phrases or names.
- No need to over-practice to the point where you have memorized your notes.
- The key is to be familiar with your notes and to create that muscle memory so it will be second nature to you when you are giving your speech.

Once you are comfortable with your verbal and nonverbal performance, it's time to practice in front of real people. A tried-and-true strategy, especially for new speakers, is to practice in front of a live audience, however small, before speech day.

Try This 12.6.2 Practice with an Audience

- It's best to choose people who will be honest but kind. That could be parents, siblings, friends, roommates, or even classmates.
- If you are particularly nervous, you may want to start giving your speech to just one person.
- Ideally, you should give your speech at least once to a group of 3 or 4 people, so you get different opinions.
- After the speech, get feedback from them.
- If you are concerned about voice projection, if you have a face-to-face audience, have at least one person in your practice audience sit far away.
- If you are giving your speech virtually (Zoom, Skype, etc.), it's best to practice in that modality so your practice audience can confirm your connection, lighting, camera angle, and eye contact will contribute to an effective presentation.
- Be sure to take these steps at least a few days before your speech so you have time to improve or change your speech based on their feedback.

Once you have completed these steps, you will feel more confident with your notes and delivery of your speech. That means you will probably be less nervous, and that reduced anxiety is likely to improve the performance of your speech. And with that success behind you, your next speech will be a little bit easier.

Good luck!

Key Takeaways

- Recognize that practice and preparation reduce stress and improve the likelihood of a successful extemporaneous speech.
- Select the note method, such as note cards, paper, laptop, tablet, slides, or phone, that best fits your speaking context and delivery style.
- Develop effective notes by using keywords, avoiding full sentences, and revising until they support a conversational delivery.
- Practice with your chosen note method, visual aids, and technology to anticipate problems and build confidence.
- Adapt your notes and delivery for videoconferencing by maintaining eye contact with the camera, positioning notes at eye level or just below, and testing your microphone and setup in advance.

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12.7: Practicing for Successful Speech Delivery

Each Speaker Is Unique

There is no foolproof recipe for good delivery. Each of us is unique, and we each embody different experiences and interests. This means each person has an approach or style that is effective for them. This further means that anxiety can accompany even the most carefully researched and interesting message. Even when we know our messages are strong and well articulated on paper, it is difficult to know for sure that our presentation will be good.

We are still obligated to do our best out of respect for the audience and their needs. Fortunately, there are some tools that can be helpful to you even the very first time you present a speech. You will continue developing your skills each time you put them to use, and you can experiment to find which combination of delivery elements is most effective for you.



Figure 12.7.1: Actor and advocate RJ Mitte enhances his message and adds interest and energy to his delivery through facial expressions and body language. (CC BY 2.0; Texas A&M University-Commerce Marketing Communications Photography via Wikimedia Commons)

What Is Good Delivery?

The more you care about your topic, the greater your motivation to present it well. Good delivery is a process of presenting a clear, coherent message in an interesting way. Communication scholar Stephen E. Lucas tells us:

> Good delivery...conveys the speaker's ideas clearly, interestingly, and without distracting the audience. Most audiences prefer delivery that combines a certain degree of formality with the best attributes of good conversation: directness, spontaneity, animation, vocal and facial expressiveness, and a lively sense of communication (Lucas, 2009).

Many writers on the nonverbal aspects of delivery have cited the findings of psychologist Albert Mehrabian, asserting that the bulk of an audience's understanding of your message is based on nonverbal communication. Specifically, Mehrabian is often credited with finding that when audiences decoded a speaker's meaning, the speaker's face conveyed 55 percent of the information, the vocalics conveyed 38 percent, and the words conveyed just 7 percent (Mehrabian, 1972). Although numerous scholars, including Mehrabian himself, have stated that his findings are often misinterpreted (Mitchell, n.d), scholars and speech instructors do agree that nonverbal communication and speech delivery are extremely important to effective public speaking.

In this section of the chapter, we will explain six elements of good delivery: conversational style, conversational quality, eye contact, vocalics, physical manipulation, and variety. And since delivery is only as good as the practice that goes into it, we

conclude with some tips for effective use of your practice time.

Conversational Style

Conversational style is a speaker's ability to sound expressive and to be perceived by the audience as natural. It's a style that approaches the way you normally express yourself in a much smaller group than your classroom audience. This means that you want to avoid having your presentation come across as didactic or overly exaggerated. You might not feel natural while you're using a conversational style, but for the sake of audience preference and receptiveness, you should do your best to appear natural. It might be helpful to remember that the two most important elements of the speech are the message and the audience. You are the conduit with the important role of putting the two together in an effective way. Your audience should be thinking about the message, not the delivery.

Stephen E. Lucas defines conversational quality as the idea that "no matter how many times a speech has been rehearsed, it still *sounds* spontaneous" [emphasis in original] (Lucas, 2009). No one wants to hear a speech that is so well rehearsed that it sounds fake or robotic. One of the hardest parts of public speaking is rehearsing to the point where it can appear to your audience that the thoughts are magically coming to you while you're speaking, but in reality, you've spent a great deal of time thinking through each idea. When you can sound conversational, people pay attention.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is a speaker's ability to have visual contact with everyone in the audience. Your audience should feel that you're speaking to them, not simply uttering main and supporting points. If you are new to public speaking, you may find it intimidating to look audience members in the eye, but if you think about speakers you have seen who did not maintain eye contact, you'll realize why this aspect of speech delivery is important. Without eye contact, the audience begins to feel invisible and unimportant, as if the speaker is just speaking to hear their own voice. Eye contact lets your audience feel that your attention is on them, not solely on the cards in front of you.

Sustained eye contact with your audience is one of the most important tools for effective delivery. O'Hair, Stewart, and Rubenstein note that eye contact is mandatory for speakers to establish a good relationship with an audience (O'Hair et al., 2001). Whether a speaker is speaking before a group of five or five hundred, the appearance of eye contact is an important way to bring an audience into your speech.

Eye contact can be a powerful tool. It is not simply a sign of sincerity, a sign of being well prepared and knowledgeable, or a sign of confidence; it also has the power to convey meanings. Arthur Koch tells us that all facial expressions "can communicate a wide range of emotions, including sadness, compassion, concern, anger, annoyance, fear, joy, and happiness" (Koch, 2010).

If you find the gaze of your audience too intimidating, you might feel tempted to resort to "faking" eye contact with them by looking at the wall just above their heads or by sweeping your gaze around the room instead of making actual eye contact with individuals in your audience until it becomes easier to provide real contact. The problem with fake eye contact is that it tends to look mechanical. Another problem with fake attention is that you lose the opportunity to assess the audience's understanding of your message. Still, fake eye contact is somewhat better than gripping your cards and staring at them, and only occasionally glancing quickly and shallowly at the audience.

This is not to say that you may never look at your notes. On the contrary, one of the skills in extemporaneous speaking is the ability to alternate one's gaze between the audience and one's notes. Rehearsing your presentation in front of a few friends should help you develop the ability to maintain eye contact with your audience while referring to your notes. When you are giving a speech that is well prepared and well rehearsed, you will only need to look at your notes occasionally. This is an ability that will develop even further with practice. Your public speaking course is your best chance to get that practice.

Effective Use of Vocalics

Vocalics, also known as paralanguage, is the subfield of nonverbal communication that examines how we use our voices to communicate orally. This means that you speak loudly enough for all audience members (even those in the back of the room) to hear you clearly, and that you enunciate clearly enough to be understood by all audience members (even those who may have a hearing impairment or who may be English-language learners). If you tend to be soft-spoken, you will need to practice using a louder volume level that may feel unnatural to you at first. For all speakers, good vocalic technique is best achieved by facing the audience with your chin up and your eyes away from your notes and by setting your voice at a moderate speed. Effective use of

vocalics also means that you make use of appropriate pitch, pauses, vocal variety, and correct pronunciation.

If you are a non-native English speaker and feel apprehensive about giving a speech in English, there are two things to remember: first, you can meet with a reference librarian to learn the correct pronunciations of any English words you are unsure of; and second, the fact that you have an accent means you speak more languages than most Americans, which is an accomplishment to be proud of.

If you are one of the many people with a stutter or other speech challenge, you undoubtedly already know that there are numerous techniques for reducing stuttering and improving speech fluency and that there is no one agreed-upon "cure." The Academy Award–winning movie *The King's Speech* did much to raise public awareness of what a person with a stutter experiences when it comes to public speaking. It also prompted well-known individuals who stutter, such as television journalist John Stossel, to speak publicly about their experiences with stuttering (Stuttering Foundation, 2011). If you have decided to study public speaking in spite of a speech challenge, we commend you for your efforts and encourage you to work with your speech instructor to make whatever adaptations work best for you.



Figure 12.7.2: Actors Colin Firth and Helena Bonham Carter depict historic figures King George VI of England and his wife Queen Elizabeth in the film "The King's Speech," which focuses on the king's lifelong issues with stuttering. This problem became particularly challenging during his reign as king when he frequently had to speak publicly. (CC BY 2.0; www.lancashire.gov.uk via Wikimedia Commons)

Volume

Volume refers to the loudness or softness of a speaker's voice. As mentioned, public speakers need to speak loudly enough to be heard by everyone in the audience. In addition, volume is often needed to overcome ambient noise, such as the hum of an air conditioner or the dull roar of traffic passing by. In addition, you can use volume strategically to emphasize the most important points in your speech. Select these points carefully; if you emphasize everything, nothing will seem important. You also want to be sure to adjust your volume to the physical setting of the presentation. If you are in a large auditorium and your audience is several yards away, you will need to speak louder. If you are in a smaller space, with the audience a few feet away, you want to avoid overwhelming your audience with shouting or speaking too loudly.

Rate

Rate is the speed at which a person speaks. To keep your speech delivery interesting, your rate should vary. If you are speaking extemporaneously, your rate will naturally fluctuate. If you're reading, your delivery is less likely to vary. Because rate is an important tool in enhancing the meanings in your speech, you do not want to give a monotone drone or a rapid "machine-gun" style delivery. Your rate should be appropriate for your topic and your points. A rapid, lively rate can communicate such meanings as enthusiasm, urgency, or humor. A slower, moderated rate can convey respect, seriousness, or careful reasoning. By varying rapid and slower rates within a single speech, you can emphasize your main points and keep your audience interested.

Pitch

Pitch refers to the highness or lowness of a speaker's voice. Some speakers have deep voices, and others have high voices. As with one's singing voice range, the pitch of one's speaking voice is determined to a large extent by physiology (specifically, the length of one's vocal folds, or cords, and the size of one's vocal tract). We all have a normal speaking pitch where our voice is naturally settled, the pitch where we are most comfortable speaking, and most teachers advise speaking at the pitch that feels natural to you.

While our voices may be generally comfortable at a specific pitch level, we all have the ability to modulate, or move, our pitch up or down. In fact, we do this all the time. When we change the pitch of our voices, we are using inflections. Just as you can use volume strategically, you can also use pitch inflections to make your delivery more interesting and emphatic. If you ordinarily speak with a soprano voice, you may want to drop your voice to a slightly lower range to call attention to a particular point. How we use inflections can even change the entire meaning of what we are saying. For example, try saying the sentence "I love public speaking" with a higher pitch on one of the words—first raise the pitch on "I," then say it again with the pitch raised on "love," and so on. "*I* love public speaking" conveys a different meaning from "I love *public* speaking," doesn't it?

There are some speakers who don't change their pitch at all while speaking, which is called monotone. While very few people are completely monotone, some speakers slip into monotone patterns because of nerves. One way to ascertain whether you sound monotone is to record your voice and see how you sound. If you notice that your voice doesn't fluctuate very much, you will need to be intentional in altering your pitch to ensure that the emphasis of your speech isn't completely lost on your audience.

Finally, resist the habit of pitching your voice "up" at the ends of sentences. It makes them sound like questions instead of statements. This habit can be disorienting and distracting, interfering with the audience's ability to focus entirely on the message. The speaker sounds uncertain or sounds as though they are seeking the understanding or approval of the listener. It undermines the speaker's credibility and needs to be avoided.

The effective use of pitch is one of the keys to an interesting delivery that will hold your audience's attention.

Pauses

Pauses are brief breaks in a speaker's delivery that can show emphasis and enhance the clarity of a message. In terms of timing, the effective use of pauses is one of the most important skills to develop. Some speakers become uncomfortable very quickly with the "dead air" that the pause causes. And if the speaker is uncomfortable, the discomfort can transmit itself to the audience. That doesn't mean you should avoid using pauses; your ability to use them confidently will increase with practice. Some of the best comedians use the well-timed pause to powerful and hilarious effect. Although your speech will not be a comedy routine, pauses are still useful for emphasis, especially when combined with a lowered pitch and rate to emphasize the important point you do not want your audience to miss.

Vocal Variety

Vocal variety has to do with changes in the vocalics we have just discussed: volume, pitch, rate, and pauses. No one wants to hear the same volume, pitch, rate, or use of pauses over and over again in a speech. Your audience should never be able to detect that you're about to slow down or that your voice is going to get deeper because you're making an important point. When you think about how you sound in a normal conversation, your use of volume, pitch, rate, and pauses is all done spontaneously. If you try to overrehearse your vocalics, your speech will end up sounding artificial. Vocal variety should flow naturally from your wish to speak with expression. In that way, it will animate your speech and invite your listeners to understand your topic the way you do.

Pronunciation

The last major category related to vocalics is **pronunciation**, or the conventional patterns of speech used to form a word. Word pronunciation is important for two reasons: first, mispronouncing a word your audience is familiar with will harm your credibility as a speaker; and second, mispronouncing a word they are unfamiliar with can confuse and even misinform them. If there is any possibility at all that you don't know the correct pronunciation of a word, find out. Many online dictionaries, such as Wiktionary, provide free audio files illustrating word pronunciation.

Many have commented on the mispronunciation of words such as "nuclear" and "cavalry" by highly educated public speakers, including US presidents. There have been classroom examples as well. For instance, a student giving a speech on the Greek

philosopher Socrates mispronounced his name at least eight times during her speech. This mispronunciation created a situation of great awkwardness and anxiety for the audience. Everyone felt embarrassed, and the teacher, opting not to humiliate the student in front of the class, could not say anything out loud, instead providing a private written comment at the end of class.

One important aspect of pronunciation is articulation, or the ability to clearly pronounce each of a succession of syllables used to make up a word. Some people have difficulty articulating because of physiological problems that can be treated by trained speech therapists, but other people have articulation problems because they come from a cultural milieu where a dialect other than standard American English is the norm. Speech therapists, who generally guide their clients toward standard American English, use the acronym SODA when helping people learn how to articulate substitutions, omissions, distortions, and additions more effectively.

Speaking Clearly

- **Substitutions:** These occur when a speaker replaces one consonant or vowel with another consonant (water becomes wudda; ask becomes ax; mouth becomes mouf).
- **Omissions:** These occur when a speaker drops a consonant or vowel within a word (Internet becomes Innet; mesmerized becomes memerized; probably becomes prolly).
- **Distortions:** These occur when a speaker articulates a word with nasal or slurring sounds (pencil sounds like mencil; precipitation sounds like persination; second sounds like slecond).
- **Additions:** These occur when a speaker adds consonants or vowels to words that are not there (anyway becomes anyways; athletic becomes athaletic; black becomes buhlack; interpret becomes interpretate).

Another aspect of pronunciation in public speaking is avoiding the use of verbal surrogates or "filler" words used as placeholders for actual words (like *er*, *um*, *uh*, etc.). You might be able to get away with saying "um" as many as two or three times in your speech before it becomes distracting, but the same cannot be said of "like." The key is to become aware of this habit by listening to feedback and recording your practice sessions. When you start to say that filler word, pause instead. Eventually, you will say filler words less frequently.

Effective Physical Manipulation

In addition to using our voices effectively, a key to effective public speaking is physical manipulation, or the use of the body to emphasize meanings or convey meanings during a speech. While we will not attempt to give an entire discourse on nonverbal communication, we will discuss a few basic aspects of physical manipulation: posture, body movement, facial expressions, and dress. These aspects add up to the overall physical dimension of your speech, which we call self-presentation.

Posture

"Stand up tall!" I'm sure we've all heard this statement from a parent or a teacher at some point in our lives. The fact is, posture is actually quite important. When you stand up straight, you communicate to your audience, without saying a word, that you hold a position of power and take your position seriously. If, however, you are slouching, hunched over, or leaning on something, you could be perceived as ill-prepared, anxious, lacking in credibility, or not serious about your responsibilities as a speaker. An effective speaker demonstrates their confidence by using the podium as a place to put their notes, not to lean on or hide behind. While speakers often assume a more casual posture as a presentation continues (especially if it is a long one, such as a ninety-minute class lecture), it is always wise to start by standing up straight and putting your best foot forward. Remember, you only get one shot at making a first impression, and your body's orientation is one of the first pieces of information audiences use to make that impression.



Figure 12.7.3: This speaker uses the podium well as she gives her speech in Pacific Islander traditional dress at the Asian Pacific Heritage Month Program at HUD Headquarters. (Public Domain; National Archives at College Park-Still Pictures via Wikimedia Commons)

Body Movement

Unless you are stuck behind a podium because of the need to use a non-movable microphone, you should never stand in one place during a speech. However, movement during a speech should also not resemble pacing, which can communicate nervousness to the audience. As speakers, we must be mindful of how we move while speaking. One common method for easily integrating some movement into your speech is to take a few steps any time you transition from one idea to the next. By only moving at transition points, not only do you help focus your audience's attention on the transition from one idea to the next, but you also are able to increase your nonverbal immediacy by getting closer to different segments of your audience.

Body movement also includes gestures. These should be neither overly dramatic nor subdued. At one extreme, arm-waving and fist-pounding will distract from your message and reduce your credibility. At the other extreme, refraining from the use of gestures is the waste of an opportunity to suggest emphasis, enthusiasm, or other personal connection with your topic.

There are many ways to use gestures. The most obvious are hand gestures, which should be used in moderation at carefully selected times in the speech. If you overuse gestures, they lose meaning. Many late-night comedy parodies of political leaders include patterned, overused gestures or other delivery habits associated with a particular speaker. However, the well-placed use of simple, natural gestures to indicate emphasis, direction, and size is usually effective. Normally, a gesture with one hand is enough. Rather than trying to have a gesture for every sentence, use just a few well-planned gestures. It is often more effective to make a gesture and hold it for a few moments than to begin waving your hands and arms around in a series of gestures.

Finally, just as you should avoid pacing, you will also want to avoid other distracting movements while speaking. Many speakers have unconscious mannerisms such as twirling their hair, putting their hands in and out of their pockets, jingling their keys, licking their lips, or clicking a pen while speaking. Some speakers may be sitting while speaking because they are part of a panel or presenting via videoconference, and they distract the audience by constantly swiveling in their chairs. As with other aspects of speech delivery, practicing in front of others will help you become conscious of such distractions and plan ways to avoid them.

Facial Expressions

Faces are amazing things and convey so much information. As speakers, we must be acutely aware of how our faces look while speaking. While many of us do not look forward to seeing ourselves on videotape, often the only way you can critically evaluate what your face is doing while you are speaking is to watch a recording of your speech. If the video is not available, you can practice speaking in front of a mirror.

There are two extremes you want to avoid: no facial expression and overanimated facial expressions. First, you do not want to have a completely blank face while speaking. Some people just do not show much emotion with their faces naturally, but this blankness is often increased when the speaker is nervous. Audiences will react negatively to the message of such a speaker

because they will sense that something is amiss. If a speaker is talking about the joys of Disney World and his face doesn't show any excitement, the audience will be turned off by the speaker and his message. At the other extreme is the speaker whose face resembles that of an exaggerated cartoon character. Instead, your goal is to show a variety of appropriate facial expressions while speaking.

Like vocalics and gestures, facial expression can be used strategically to enhance meaning. A smile or pleasant facial expression is generally appropriate at the beginning of a speech to indicate your wish for a good transaction with your audience. However, you should not smile throughout a speech on drug addiction, poverty, or the oil spill. An inappropriate smile creates confusion about your meaning and may make your audience feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, a serious scowl might look hostile or threatening to audience members and become a distraction from the message. If you keep the meaning of your speech foremost in your mind, you will more readily find the balance in facial expression.

Dress

While there are no clear-cut guidelines for how you should dress for every speech you'll give, dress is still a very important part of how others will perceive you (again, it's all about the first impression). If you want to be taken seriously, you must present yourself seriously. While we do not advocate dressing formally every time you give a speech, there are definitely times when dressing professionally is appropriate. Typically, you want to avoid creating distractions in your appearance. Overly tight or revealing garments, over-the-top hairstyles or makeup, jangling jewelry, or a display of tattoos and piercings can serve to draw your audience's attention away from your speech.

One general rule you can use for determining dress is the "step-above rule," which states that you should dress one step above your audience. If your audience will be dressed casually in shorts and jeans, wear nice casual clothing yourself. If, however, your audience is going to be wearing "business casual" attire, then you should probably wear a sport coat, a dress, or a suit. The goal of the step-above rule is to establish yourself as someone to be taken seriously. On the other hand, if you dress two steps above your audience, you may put too much distance between yourself and your audience, coming across as overly formal or even arrogant.

However, what if your status and credibility are well above those of your audience? And your goal is to emphasize the common ground you have with them? Then you may consider dressing in a way that is more like what your audience members are wearing. But be sure what you wear does not come across as "fake," such as an adult trying to dress like a teenager. If you look like a phony, your audience may decide your message is suspect as well. In Figure 12.7.4, we have an example of a speaker who avoids that trap. While General Brown chooses to dress more informally for this speaking occasion, he keeps within the bounds of a uniform appropriate to his relationship with his audience.

When selecting your clothing and accessories, you may decide that they will be a neutral element to your performance, or perhaps even reinforce your message. But your appearance should never detract from your speech.



Figure 12.7.4: General Charles Q. Brown, Jr., wearing his army fatigue uniform, addresses students from Air War College and Air Command and Staff College at Air University. (CC BY-SA 4.0; U.S. Air Force Archive via Wikimedia Commons)

Self-Presentation

When you present your speech, you are also presenting yourself. Self-presentation, sometimes also referred to as poise or stage presence, is determined by how you look, how you stand, how you walk to the lectern, and how you use your voice and gestures. Your self-presentation can either enhance your message or detract from it. Worse, a poor self-presentation can turn a good, well-prepared speech into a forgettable waste of time. You want your self-presentation to support your credibility and improve the likelihood that the audience will listen with interest.

As mentioned above, your personal appearance should reflect the careful preparation of your speech. Your personal appearance is the first thing your audience will see, and from it, they will make inferences about the speech you're about to present.

Variety

One of the biggest mistakes novice public speakers make is using the same gesture over and over during a speech. While you don't want your gestures to look fake, you should be careful to include a variety of different nonverbal components while speaking. You should make sure that your face, body, and words work together to support your message.

Practice Effectively

You might get away with presenting a hastily practiced speech, but the speech will not be as good as it could be. To develop your best speech delivery, you need to practice and use your practice time effectively. Practicing does not mean reading over your notes, mentally running through your speech, or even speaking your speech aloud over and over. Instead, you need to practice with the goal of identifying the weaknesses in your delivery, improving upon them, and building good speech delivery habits.

When you practice your speech, place both your feet in full, firm contact with the floor to keep your body from swaying side to side. Some new public speakers find that they don't know what to do with their hands during the speech. Your practice sessions should help you get comfortable. When you're not gesturing, you can rest your free hand lightly on a lectern or simply allow it to hang at your side. Since this is not a familiar posture for most people, it might feel awkward, but during your practice sessions, you can begin to get used to it.

Seek Input from Others

Because we can't see ourselves as others see us, one of the best ways to improve our delivery is to seek constructive criticism from others. This, of course, is an aspect of your public speaking course, as you will receive evaluations from your instructor and possibly from your fellow students. However, by practicing in front of others before it is time to present your speech, you can anticipate and correct problems so that you can receive a better evaluation when you give the speech "for real."

Ask your practice observers to be honest about the aspects of your delivery that could be better. Sometimes students create study groups just for this purpose. When you create a study group of classroom peers, everyone has an understanding of the entire creative process, and their feedback will thus be more useful to you than the feedback you might get from someone who has never taken the course or given a speech.

If your practice observers seem reluctant to offer useful criticisms, ask questions. How was your eye contact? Could they hear you? Was your voice well modulated? Did you mispronounce any words? How was your posture? Were your gestures effective? Did you have any mannerisms that you should learn to avoid? Because peers are sometimes reluctant to say things that could sound critical, direct questions are often a useful way to help them speak up.

If you learn from these practice sessions that your voice tends to drop at the ends of sentences, make a conscious effort to support your voice as you conclude each main point. If you learn that you have a habit of clicking a pen, make sure you don't have a pen with you when you speak, or that you keep it in your pocket. If your practice observers mention that you tend to hide your hands in the sleeves of your shirt or jacket, next time wear short sleeves or roll your sleeves up before beginning your speech. If you learn through practice that you tend to sway or rock while you speak, you can consciously practice and build the habit of *not* swaying.

When it is your turn to give feedback to others in your group, assume that they are as interested in doing well as you are. Give feedback in the spirit of helping their speeches be as good as possible.

Use Audio and/or Video to Record Yourself

Technology has made it easier than ever to record yourself and others. Video, of course, allows you the advantage of being able to see yourself as others see you, while audio allows you to concentrate on the audible aspects of your delivery. As we mentioned earlier in the chapter, if neither video nor audio is available, you can always observe yourself by practicing your delivery in front of a mirror.

After you have recorded yourself, it may seem obvious that you should watch and listen to the recording. This can be intimidating, as you may fear that your performance anxiety will be so obvious that everyone will notice it in the recording. But students are often pleasantly surprised when they watch and listen to their recordings, as even students with very high anxiety may find out that they "come across" in a speech much better than they expected.

A recording can also be a very effective diagnostic device. Sometimes students believe they are making strong contact with their audiences, but because much or all of their notes contain the complete text of their speech, they succumb to the temptation of reading. By finding out from the video that you misjudged your eye contact, you can be motivated to rewrite your notes in a way that doesn't provide the opportunity to do so much reading.

It is likely that, by viewing your recording, you will benefit from discovering your strengths and identifying areas for improvement.

Good Delivery Is a Habit

Luckily, public speaking is an activity that, when done conscientiously, strengthens with practice. As you become aware of the areas where your delivery has room for improvement, you will begin developing a keen sense of what "works" and what audiences respond to.

It is advisable to practice out loud in front of other people several times, spreading your rehearsals out over several days. To do this kind of practice, of course, you need to have your speech finalized well ahead of the date when you are going to give it. During these practice sessions, you can time your speech to make sure it lasts the appropriate length of time.

Your practice sessions will also enable you to make adjustments to your notes to make them more effective in supporting your

contact with your audience. This kind of practice is not just a strategy for beginners; it is practiced by many highly placed public figures with extensive experience in public speaking.

Your public speaking course is one of the best opportunities you will have to manage your performance anxiety, build your confidence in speaking extemporaneously, develop your vocal skills, and become adept at self-presentation. The habits you can develop through targeted practice are to build continuously on your strengths and to challenge yourself to find new areas for improving your delivery. By taking advantage of these opportunities, you will gain the ability to present a speech effectively whenever you may be called upon to speak publicly.

Key Takeaways

- Conversational style is a speaker's ability to sound expressive while being perceived by the audience as natural. Conversational quality is a speaker's ability to prepare a speech and rehearse a speech but still sound spontaneous when delivering it.
- Eye contact helps capture and maintain an audience's interest while contributing to the speaker's credibility.
- Vocalics are the nonverbal components of the verbal message. There are six important vocalic components for a speaker to be aware of: volume (loudness or softness), pitch (highness or lowness), rate (fastness or slowness), pauses (use of breaks to add emphasis), vocal variety (use of a range of vocalic strategies), and pronunciation (using conventional patterns of speech formation).
- Avoid repetitive nervous behavior that will distract the audience.
- Good delivery is a habit that is built through effective practice.

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12.8: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

Public speaking is a skill that can be learned and strengthened with preparation, practice, and self-awareness. This chapter has emphasized that effective delivery is not just about what you say, but how you say it and how you connect with your audience. By exploring communication apprehension, delivery methods, speaking contexts, note use, and the value of practice, you have gained tools to manage nerves, enhance performance, and present your ideas with greater confidence and clarity.

We began by examining communication apprehension, the anxiety many people feel when speaking in public. Rather than being an insurmountable obstacle, this anxiety can be managed. Recognizing the different types of apprehension—trait, context, audience, and situational—helps speakers better understand their own nervousness and choose appropriate strategies to reduce it. We covered various methods such as positive self-talk, deep breathing, vocal warm-ups, and cognitive restructuring to reframe anxiety as a natural and manageable part of the process.

The chapter also explored the importance of considering the type of delivery that is best for your style, your speaking context, topic, and audience. Some of these variables include vocal variety, eye contact, body movement, and nonverbal cues. We examined the four methods of delivery: impromptu, extemporaneous, manuscript, and memorized. While it has advantages and drawbacks depending on the situation, extemporaneous delivery with its conversational, engaging style, is best in most situations.

In addition, this chapter highlighted the strategic use of notes. In extemporaneous delivery, notes are not meant to serve as a script but as a guide to help speakers recall main ideas and transitions. Whether using note cards, paper, or digital devices, the key is to keep notes simple, clear, and easy to see key information at a glance. Practicing with your chosen note method ensures familiarity and reduces distractions. Similarly, consistent practice—alone, recorded, and in front of others—is crucial for building confidence, refining nonverbal delivery, and strengthening vocal performance. Seeking constructive feedback and adjusting based on it allows you to continue improving with each presentation.

Ultimately, effective public speaking delivery combines preparation, practice, and adaptability. By learning to manage communication apprehension, choosing the right delivery method, preparing for your speaking context, and practicing with well-designed notes, you can increase both your confidence and your impact as a speaker. The skills developed in this chapter will not only help you succeed in classroom presentations but also prepare you for professional and personal communication challenges beyond college. With continued effort, you will find that each speech becomes an opportunity to grow, connect, and inspire.

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12.10: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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12.10.1: Exercises

12.1: What Is Communication Apprehension?

1. Write about a time when you experienced communication apprehension. What were the physical symptoms you noticed? How did you handle the situation? What could you have done differently?
2. Find a famous speech where the speaker overcame communication apprehension. Analyze how they managed their nervousness and what techniques they used to engage the audience effectively.
3. Practice deep breathing exercises each day to help manage anxiety. Reflect on how this practice affects your overall sense of calmness and confidence.
4. Prepare a short speech on a topic of your choice (keep it simple) and present it to a small group of friends or family. Pay attention to any physical symptoms of nervousness and reflect on strategies you can use to improve your delivery.

12.2: Why Do We Get Communication Apprehension?

1. Think about a time when you experienced trait anxiety in a communication situation. How did it impact your ability to communicate effectively? What strategies could you use to manage trait anxiety in the future?
2. Investigate how context anxiety can affect public speakers in different settings. Find examples of formal, uncertain, and novel communication contexts and analyze how individuals can overcome anxiety in these situations.
3. Practice delivering a speech in front of different types of audiences to build confidence and overcome anxiety.

12.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension

1. Choose a topic and analyze the characteristics of a potential audience. Develop a strategy to engage the audience based on their demographics, interests, and preferences to reduce anxiety during speech delivery.
2. Create a detailed outline for a speech on a topic of your choice. Practice delivering the speech out loud while following the outline to improve organization and reduce anxiety during delivery.
3. Develop a stress management plan for public speaking situations. Identify techniques such as deep breathing and physical relaxation exercises to manage anxiety before and during a speech.
4. Record yourself practicing a speech in a setting similar to where you will deliver it. Pay attention to your body language, vocal tone, and pacing. Review the recording to identify areas for improvement and practice implementing stress management techniques.
5. Pair up with a classmate and exchange feedback on a practice speech. Provide constructive feedback on each other's delivery, organization, and engagement with the audience. Discuss strategies for managing anxiety based on each other's observations.

12.4: Four Methods of Delivery

1. Watch a video of a speech and analyze the speaker's reaction to nonverbal feedback from the audience. Identify moments where the speaker adjusts their delivery based on audience cues and discuss the effectiveness of their responses.
2. Watch three different speeches online, one each delivered impromptu, extemporaneously, and from a manuscript or memory. Critique each speech based on the speaker's engagement with the audience, clarity of message, and ability to respond to nonverbal feedback. Reflect on the effectiveness of each delivery style and identify strengths and weaknesses.
3. Keep a journal where you document instances of impromptu, extemporaneous, and memorized speeches you encounter in daily life or media. Note down your observations on when each style was done well or poorly, and analyze the impact of the delivery style on audience engagement and message delivery.
4. Think about a memorable speech you have witnessed in the past, either in person or through a recording. Reflect on the speaker's delivery style - impromptu, extemporaneous, or from a manuscript/memory. Consider how the speaker's style influenced your perception of the message and the overall effectiveness of the speech.

12.5: Speaking Contexts that Affect Delivery

1. Watch videos of speeches delivered in different physical spaces - small, large, outdoor, and online. Critique each speaker's adaptation to the space, including voice projection, gestures, and use of visual aids. Reflect on how the venue impacted the speaker's delivery and audience engagement.
2. Prepare and deliver a short presentation on a topic of your choice using a videoconferencing platform like Zoom. Record your presentation, focusing on eye contact, vocal delivery, and engagement with the virtual audience. Evaluate your performance and identify areas for improvement.
3. Reflect on the impact of audience size on public speaking. Watch speeches delivered to small, medium, and large audiences online. Analyze how the speaker adjusts their delivery style based on audience size and engagement. Consider how audience size influences the speaker's approach to communication.
4. Think about a time when you spoke in a different physical space than usual - small, large, outdoor, or online. Reflect on the challenges you faced in adapting to the new environment and how you managed to effectively communicate your message. Identify strategies you used to overcome venue-specific obstacles.

12.6: Using Notes Effectively

1. Write a short reflection comparing and contrasting the pros and cons of using note cards, paper, laptop, tablet, presentation slides, and phone for speech notes. Include your personal preference and explain why you chose that method.
2. Choose a topic of interest and choose two note methods. Create a short, simple speech and record your speech using first one method, then the other one. Evaluate which one works best for you. Explain why.
3. Record a 2-minute practice speech using your preferred note-taking method for a videoconference presentation. Watch the recording and assess your eye contact, delivery, and overall performance. Make adjustments as needed.
4. Present a short speech to a small group of friends or family members using your chosen note-taking method. Ask for feedback on your delivery, if your message was clear, and overall effectiveness. Use their input to improve your speech for the final presentation.
5. Practice your final speech in front of a mirror or record yourself to evaluate your body language, tone of voice, and use of notes. Make any necessary adjustments to enhance your presentation skills.

12.7: Practicing for Successful Speech Delivery

1. Watch a recorded speech or presentation online and analyze the speaker's nonverbal communication cues, such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures. Write a short reflection on how these nonverbal cues impacted the overall delivery of the message.
2. Research and practice vocal warm-up exercises used by professional speakers and actors to improve vocal clarity, projection, and articulation. Create a daily vocal warm-up routine and track your progress in a journal.
3. Choose a random topic or question from a list and practice delivering a one-minute impromptu speech on that topic. Focus on organizing your thoughts quickly, maintaining a conversational tone, and engaging the listener without prior preparation.
4. Explore online resources, such as TED Talks, public speaking blogs, or podcasts, that offer tips and techniques for improving public speaking skills. Write a summary of the most valuable insights you gained from these resources and how you plan to apply them in your own speaking practice.

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12.10.2: Discussion Questions

12.1: What Is Communication Apprehension?

1. What are some common physical symptoms of communication apprehension? How do these symptoms impact a speaker's performance?
2. Why is it important for speakers to understand the physiological responses to stress during public speaking? How can this knowledge help in managing communication apprehension?
3. Discuss the myths surrounding communication apprehension mentioned in the reading. How can debunking these myths help speakers improve their confidence and performance?

12.2: How Do We Get Communication Apprehension?

1. What is trait anxiety, and how does it differ from situational anxiety? How can individuals with high trait anxiety work towards improving their public speaking skills?
2. Discuss the impact of context anxiety on public speakers. How can formal, uncertain, and novel communication contexts influence an individual's level of anxiety?
3. How does audience anxiety manifest in public speaking situations? What audience characteristics can contribute to increased speech anxiety for speakers?
4. Explain the concept of situational anxiety in communication events. How can an understanding of the unique combination of influences help speakers manage anxiety and deliver effective presentations?

12.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension

1. How can the use of visual aids and physical movement help speakers manage anxiety during a speech? Discuss the benefits of incorporating visual aids and movement to engage the audience and reduce nervousness.
2. Explain the role of audience feedback in reducing speech anxiety. How can positive audience responses and interactions during a speech help speakers build confidence and overcome communication apprehension?
3. Discuss the stages of speech delivery where anxiety levels typically peak according to research. How can speakers prepare themselves to effectively manage anxiety at each stage?
4. Why is audience analysis important for reducing speech anxiety? How can understanding audience characteristics help speakers tailor their message and engage effectively during a speech?
5. Describe the importance of clear organization and considering your audience in speech preparation. How can creating a speech outline and using appropriate language enhance a speaker's confidence and delivery?

12.4: Four Methods of Delivery

1. What are the key characteristics of impromptu speaking? How can speakers effectively structure and deliver impromptu speeches in a spontaneous manner?
2. Discuss the benefits of extemporaneous speaking in engaging an audience. How does using brief notes instead of a full manuscript help speakers maintain eye contact and respond to audience feedback during a speech?
3. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of delivering a memorized speech. How can memorization enhance or hinder a speaker's ability to maintain audience engagement and deliver a dynamic presentation?
4. Discuss one strength and one weakness (or two strengths) of your extemporaneous delivery in your last speech. Choose what another student in your group shared. Comment on how that reflection reinforces or gives you new insight about your own speaking.

12.5: Speaking Contexts that Affect Delivery

1. How does the use of a lectern impact a speaker's delivery style? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using a lectern during a speech and how speakers can effectively balance the use of a lectern with engaging the audience.

2. What adjustments should speakers make when presenting in a small versus a large physical space? How does the physical space of the venue influence voice projection, gestures, and audience interaction during a speech?
3. Explain the challenges and benefits of speaking outdoors. How can speakers effectively manage distractions, weather conditions, and audience engagement when delivering a speech in an outdoor setting?
4. Discuss the importance of microphone usage in public speaking. How can speakers adapt to different microphone styles and ensure clear and effective communication with the audience?
5. How does presenting online differ from speaking in person? What are the unique challenges and opportunities of virtual presentations, and how can speakers prepare to deliver engaging and impactful speeches in an online setting?

12.6: Using Notes Effectively

1. Share your preferred method of creating notes for speeches and explain why you find it effective. Discuss any challenges you have faced with this method and how you have overcome them.
2. How important is it to have a backup plan when using technology for speech notes? Share any experiences where technology failed during a presentation and how you managed the situation.
3. What are some key differences between delivering a speech in person versus via videoconference? How can you adapt your speech note method and delivery for a virtual presentation?
4. How valuable is feedback from peers or practice audiences in improving your speech delivery? Discuss the benefits of receiving constructive criticism and how it can enhance your public speaking skills.
5. Share strategies for reducing communication apprehension and nervousness before giving a speech. How can practicing with notes and receiving feedback help boost your confidence in public speaking?

12.7: Practicing for Successful Speech Delivery

1. Why is eye contact considered a crucial aspect of effective speech delivery? Share examples of how maintaining eye contact can enhance audience engagement and connection with the speaker.
2. How can vocal variety, pitch, rate, and pauses contribute to a dynamic and engaging speech delivery? Discuss the impact of clear pronunciation on audience understanding and speaker credibility.
3. How do body movement, gestures, facial expressions, and posture influence the overall effectiveness of a speech? Share strategies for using nonverbal communication to emphasize key points and enhance audience engagement.
4. What are some effective methods for practicing speech delivery to improve conversational style, vocalics, and body movement? Discuss the benefits of seeking feedback from peers and utilizing audio or video recordings for self-assessment.
5. Students take 3 minutes creating a "silly speech." This speech should include all the components of a speech, but on a very simple topic. Ex: How to tie your shoes. The three steps in opening a backpack. Silly. Right? But the silly topics relax the students and help them understand the components of a speech and how to deliver them extemporaneously. Then, students deliver their speech one at a time to their small group. After each speech, the group gives feedback on the speaker's extemporaneous delivery and inclusion of the components of a complete speech.

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13: INFORMATIVE SPEAKING

Overview

Informative Speaking is a type of public speaking whose primary goal is to educate, explain, or teach the audience about a topic or to increase their understanding of it. Unlike persuasive speeches, the main goal of an informative speech isn't to influence the audience or attempt to change their opinions. Rather, the purpose of informative speaking is to share knowledge about a new and interesting topic by presenting clear, accurate, and well-organized information that helps listeners understand the subject without feeling pressured to agree or take a side.

When preparing to write an informative speech, originality is essential. Indeed, informative speeches are unique because the subjects can vary from medical technology to animal research, as long as the topic is new. (Worsham & Jones, 2004). In his book *The Communication Handbook* (DeVito, 1986), Joseph DeVito summarizes informative speaking like this:

"Technically, information is something the [audience] does not already know...A speech that focuses on what listeners already know is not informative. In preparing and presenting informative speeches, you need to communicate something new to your audience. It may be a new way of looking at old things or an old way of looking at "new things" (DeVito, 1986).

Origins of Informative Speaking

Informative speaking has deep roots in the history of **rhetoric**. In Ancient Greece and Rome, philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero studied the art of communication, recognizing that speeches could serve multiple purposes: to teach (docere), to move (movere), and to delight (delectare). While persuasion often dominated classical rhetoric, the act of teaching through speech was always considered essential. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, for example, emphasized logos—the power of reasoning and explanation—as a cornerstone of effective communication.

During the Medieval and Renaissance eras, informative speaking appeared in religious sermons, lectures, and scholarly works, where clarity and accuracy were crucial for spreading doctrine and knowledge. By the 18th-20th centuries, as democracy, journalism, and public education expanded, informative speaking emerged as a distinct form of public address, increasingly separate from persuasion. In schools, universities, and civic forums, its purpose shifted toward sharing knowledge and fostering understanding rather than winning arguments.

Key features of informative speaking include:

- **Clarity** – explaining concepts in simple, understandable terms.
- **Accuracy** – using reliable facts, data, and evidence.
- **Organization** – structuring the speech logically (e.g., chronological, topical, spatial, cause-effect).
- **Engagement** – using examples, visuals, or stories to hold the audience's attention.

Typical informative speech topics might include explaining how a process works, describing an event or person, or clarifying a concept or idea.

This chapter focuses on informative speaking and how one can become skilled at sharing information in an elegant, poised, and effective manner. We'll explore the goals of informative speaking, the subjects that constitute informative speeches, and the preparation and organization of an informative speech. Finally, we will look at the delivery and method of engagement of informative speeches. The next several pages will present a clear concept of the role informative speaking plays in society.

Chapter Goals

- Explain the importance of accuracy, clarity, and listener interest in informative speaking.
- Discuss why speaking to inform is important. Identify strategies for making information clear and interesting to your speaking audience.
- Identify several categories of topics that may be used in informative speaking.

- Describe several approaches to developing a topic.
- Write a specific purpose statement
- Write effective thesis statements
- Explain the process of grouping information
- Identify strategies for effective introductions and conclusions

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Abstract
- Advocacy
- Audience Analysis
- Concrete
- Context
- Corporate Story
- Current Knowledge
- Elevator Speech
- Exploratory Research
- Extemporaneous Speech
- Group Speeches
- Impromptu Speech
- Iterative
- Jargon
- Manuscript
- Memory Palace
- Mind Map
- Personal Inventory
- Propaganda
- Research
- Rhetoric
- Specific Purpose Statement
- Thesis
- Thesis Statement
- Value

13.1: Informative Speaking Goals
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13.1: Informative Speaking Goals

Components of a Good Informative Speech

A good informative speech conveys accurate information to the audience in a way that is clear and keeps the listener interested in the topic. Achieving all three of these goals, accuracy, clarity, and interest, is the key to your effectiveness as a speaker. **Research**, which is the process of gathering, evaluating, and organizing reliable information from credible sources to enhance the accuracy, depth, and clarity of the speech, is crucial to all speeches, but particularly to informative speeches. If information is inaccurate, incomplete, or unclear, it will be of limited usefulness to the audience. Furthermore, sharing incorrect information can diminish your credibility as a speaker. In our information age, if a speaker, particularly one who has a public presence, communicates incorrect information, this misstep can go viral and ruin their reputation, not to mention those who advocate for them. It also negatively impacts the lives of those who believe the speaker.

Amid the multitude of informative topics available to discuss, there is no topic about which you can give complete information. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to carefully narrow your topic. With a carefully narrowed topic and purpose, it is possible to give an accurate picture that isn't misleading.



Figure 13.1.1: A speaker gives an informative speech for the US Pacific Southwest Forest Service. Proper research of one's subject matter is necessary to ensure that a speaker achieves the goals of accuracy, clarity, and interest. (CC BY 2.0; Pacific Southwest Region via Wikimedia Commons)

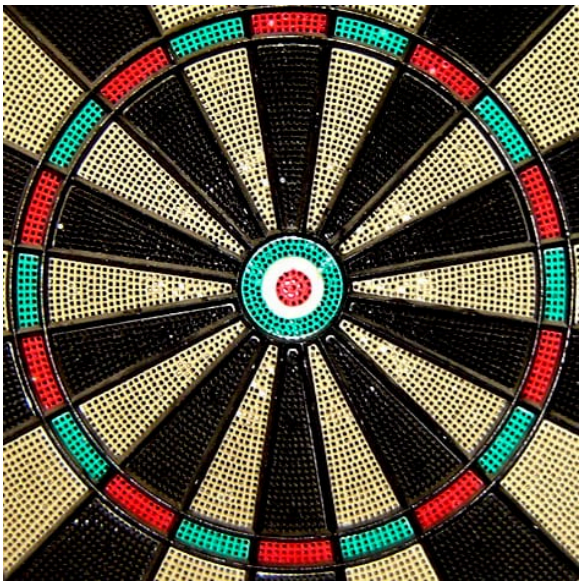


Figure 13.1.2: Consider an informative speech about the game of darts. To ensure accuracy, clarity, and interest, a speaker would need to conduct proper research into the history, popularity, and other subtopics. (CC BY 2.0; Cesar Bojorquez via Flickr)

Part of being accurate is making sure that your information is current. Even if you know a great deal about your topic or have written a good paper on the topic in a high school course, you need to verify the accuracy and completeness of what you know. Most people understand that technology changes rapidly, so you need to update your information almost constantly, but the same is true for topics that, on the surface, may seem to require less updating. For example, the American Civil War occurred over 160 years ago, but contemporary research still offers new and emerging theories about the causes of the war and its long-term effects. So even with a topic that seems to be unchanging, you need to carefully check your information to be sure it's accurate and up to date.

For your listeners to benefit from your speech, you must convey your ideas in a fashion that your audience can understand. The clarity of your speech relies on logical organization and understandable word choices. You should not assume that something obvious to you will also be obvious to the members of your audience. Formulate your work to be understood in all details, and rehearse your speech in front of peers who will tell you whether the information in your speech makes sense.

In addition to being clear, your speech should be interesting. Your listeners will benefit the most if they can give sustained attention to the speech, and this is unlikely to happen if they are bored. This often means you will decide against using some of the topics you know a great deal about. Suppose, for example, that you had a summer job as a veterinary assistant and learned a great deal about canine parasites. This topic might be very interesting to you, but how interesting will it be to others in your class? In order to make it interesting, you will need to find a way to connect it with their interests and curiosities. Perhaps certain canine parasites also pose risks to humans—this might be a connection that would increase audience interest in your topic.

The Purpose of Speaking to Inform

Informative speaking is a means for the delivery of knowledge. In informative speaking, we avoid expressing an opinion. This doesn't mean you may not speak about controversial topics. However, if you do so, you must deliver a fair statement of each side of the issue in debate. If your speech is about standardized educational testing, you must honestly represent the views both of its proponents and of its critics. You must not take sides, and you must not slant your explanation of the debate to influence the opinions of the listeners. You are simply and clearly defining the debate. If you watch the evening news on a major network television (ABC, CBS, or NBC), you will see newscasters who undoubtedly have personal opinions about the news, but are trained to avoid expressing those opinions through the use of loaded words, gestures, facial expressions, or vocal tone. Like those newscasters, you are already educating your listeners simply by informing them. Let them make up their own minds. This is probably the most important reason for informative speaking.

Making Information Clear and Interesting for the Audience

A clear and interesting speech can make use of description, causal analysis, or categories. With description, you use words

to create a picture in the minds of your audience. You can describe physical realities, social realities, emotional experiences, sequences, consequences, or contexts. For instance, you can describe the mindset of the Massachusetts town of Salem during the witch trials. You can also use causal analysis, which focuses on the connections between causes and consequences. For example, in speaking about health care costs, you could explain how a serious illness can put even a well-insured family into bankruptcy. You can also use categories to group things together. For instance, you could say that there are three categories of investment for the future: liquid savings, avoiding debt, and acquiring properties that will increase in value.



Figure 13.1.3: A Juneau Democratic caucus-goer yawns during a prepared speech. Making your information clear and interesting to your audience is a crucial component of being an effective speaker. (CC BY 2.0; James Brooks via Wikimedia Commons)

There are several principles to keep in mind as a speaker to make the information you present clear and interesting for your audience. Let's examine several of them.

Adjust the Complexity to the Audience.

If your speech is too complex or too simplistic, it will not hold the interest of your listeners. How can you determine the right level of complexity? Your **audience analysis** is one important way to do this. Will your listeners belong to a given age group, or are they more diverse? Did they all go to public schools in the United States, or are some of your listeners international students? Are they all students majoring in communication studies, or is there a mixture of majors in your audience? The answers to these and other audience analysis questions will help you gauge what they know and what they are curious about.

Never assume that just because your audience is made up of students, they all share your knowledge set. If you base your speech on an assumption of similar knowledge, it might not make sense to everyone. If, for instance, you're an intercultural communication student discussing multiple identities, the psychology students in your audience will most likely reject your message. Similarly, the term "viral" has very different meanings depending on whether it is used with respect to human disease, popular response to a website, or population theory. In using the word "viral," you absolutely must explain specifically what you mean. You should not hurry your explanation of a term that's vulnerable to misinterpretation. Make certain your listeners know what you mean before continuing your speech. Stephen Lucas explains, "You cannot assume they will know what you mean. Rather, you must be sure to explain everything so thoroughly that they cannot help but understand" (Lucas, 2004). Define terms to help listeners understand them the way you mean them to. Give explanations that are consistent with your definitions, and show how those ideas apply to your speech topic. In this way, you can avoid many misunderstandings.

Similarly, be very careful about assuming there is anything that "everybody knows." Suppose you've decided to present an informative speech on the survival of the early colonists of New England. You may have learned in elementary school that their survival was attributable, in part, to the assistance of Squanto. Many of your listeners will know which states are in New England, but if there are international students in the audience, they might never have heard of New England. You should clarify the term either by pointing out the region on a map or by stating that it's the six states in the American Northeast. Other knowledge gaps can still confound the effectiveness of the speech. For instance, who or what was Squanto? What kind of assistance did the settlers get? Only a few listeners are likely to know that Squanto spoke English, and that fact had greatly surprised the settlers

when they landed. It was through his knowledge of English that Squanto was able to advise these settlers on survival strategies during that first harsh winter. If you neglect to provide that information, your speech will not be fully informative.

Beyond the opportunity to help improve your delivery, one important outcome of practicing your speech in front of a live audience of a couple of friends or classmates is that you can become aware of terms that are confusing or that you should define for your audience.

Avoid Unnecessary Jargon

If you decide to give an informative speech on a highly specialized topic, limit how much technical language or **jargon** you use. Loading a speech with specialized language has the potential to be taxing on the listeners. It can become too difficult to "translate" your meanings, and if that happens, you will not effectively deliver information. Even if you define many technical terms, the audience may feel as if they are being bombarded with a set of definitions instead of useful information. Don't treat your speech as a crash course on an entire topic. If you must, introduce one specialized term and carefully define and explain it to the audience. Define it in words, and then use a concrete and relevant example to clarify the meaning.

Some topics, by their very nature, are too technical for a short speech. For example, in a five-minute speech, it would not be recommended to try to inform your audience about the causes of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear emergency that occurred in Japan in 2011. Other topics, while technical, can be presented in audience-friendly ways that minimize the use of technical terms. For instance, in a speech about Mount Vesuvius, the volcano that buried the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, you can use the term "pyroclastic flow" as long as you take the time to either show or tell what it means.

Create Concrete Images

As a college student, you have had a significant amount of exposure to abstract terms. You have become comfortable using and hearing a variety of abstract ideas. However, **abstract** terms lend themselves to many interpretations. For instance, the abstract term "responsibility" can mean many things. Among other meanings, it can mean duty, task, authority, or blame. Because of the potential for misunderstanding, it is better to use a **concrete** word. For example, instead of saying, "Helen Worth was responsible for the project," you will convey a clearer meaning when you say, "Helen Worth was in charge of the project," "Helen Kimes made the project a success," or "Helen Worth was to blame for the failure of the project."

To illustrate the differences between abstract and concrete language, let's look at a few pairs of terms:

Table 13.1.1 *Comparing Examples of Abstract Images with Concrete Images,*

Abstract	Concrete
transportation	air travel
success	completion of the project
discrimination	exclusion of women
athletic	physically fit
profound	knowledgeable

By using an abstraction in a sentence and then comparing the concrete term in the sentence, you will notice the more precise meanings of the concrete terms. Those precise terms are less likely to be misunderstood. In the last pair of terms, "knowledgeable" is listed as a concrete term, but it can also be considered an abstract term. Still, it's likely to be much clearer and more precise than "profound."

Keep Information Limited

When you developed your speech, you carefully narrowed your topic in order to keep information limited yet complete and coherent. If you carefully adhere to your own narrowing, you can keep from going off on tangents or confusing your audience. If you overload your audience with information, they will be unable to follow your narrative. Use the definitions, descriptions, explanations, and examples you need to make your meanings clear, but resist the temptation to add tangential information merely because you find it interesting.

Link Current Knowledge to New Knowledge

Certain sets of knowledge are common to many people in your classroom audience. For example, most of your audience is likely familiar with Wikipedia, and many have probably used it as a convenient and helpful source of information for topics related to their coursework. Because many Wikipedia entries are lengthy, greatly annotated, and followed by substantial lists of authoritative sources, many students have relied on information acquired from Wikipedia in writing papers to fulfill course requirements. All this is information that virtually every classroom listener is likely to know. This is the **current knowledge** of your audience.

Because your listeners are already familiar with Wikipedia, you can link important new knowledge to their already-existing knowledge. Wikipedia is an "open source," meaning that anyone can supplement, edit, correct, distort, or otherwise alter the information in Wikipedia. In addition to your listeners' knowledge that a great deal of good information can be found in Wikipedia, they must now know that it isn't authoritative. Some of your listeners may not enjoy hearing this message, so you must find a way to make it acceptable.

One way to make the message acceptable to your listeners is to show what Wikipedia does well. For example, some Wikipedia entries contain many good references at the end. Most of those references are likely to be authoritative, having been written by scholars. In searching for information on a topic, a student can look up one or more of those references in full-text databases or in the library. In this way, Wikipedia can help steer a student toward the authoritative information they need. Explaining this to your audience will help them accept, rather than reject, the bad news about Wikipedia.

Make It Memorable

If you've already done the preliminary work in choosing a topic, finding an interesting narrowing of that topic, developing and using presentation aids, and working to maintain audience contact, your delivery is likely to be memorable. Now you can turn to your content and find opportunities to make it appropriately vivid. You can do this by using explanations, comparisons, examples, language, and powerful images.

Let's say that you're preparing a speech on the United States' internment of Japanese American people from the San Francisco Bay area during World War II. Your goal is to paint a memorable image in your listeners' minds. You can do this through a dramatic contrast, before and after. You could say, "In 1941, the Bay Area had a vibrant and productive community of Japanese American citizens who went to work every day, opening their shops, typing reports in their offices, and teaching in their classrooms, just as they had been doing for years. But on December 7, 1941, everything changed. Within six months, Bay Area residents of Japanese ancestry were gone, transported to internment camps located hundreds of miles from the Pacific coast."

This strategy rests on the ability of the audience to visualize the two contrasting situations. You have alluded to two sets of images that are familiar to most college students, images that they can easily visualize. Once the audience's imagination is engaged in visualization, they are likely to remember the speech.

Your task of providing memorable imagery does not stop after the introduction. While maintaining an even-handed approach that does not seek to persuade, you must provide the audience with information about the circumstances that triggered the policy of internment, perhaps by describing the advice that was given to President Roosevelt by his top advisers. You might depict the conditions faced by Japanese Americans during their internment by describing a typical day in one of the camps. To conclude your speech on a memorable note, you might name a notable individual—an actor, writer, or politician—who is a survivor of the internment.



Figure 13.1.4: Former U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, a survivor of the Japanese-American internment, served as mayor of San Jose, California, and later became the first Asian-American to hold a post in the U.S. Cabinet. Sharing thought-provoking details, along with powerful images, allows a speaker to end their speech on a memorable note. (Public Domain Unknown Author via Wikimedia Commons)

Such a strategy might feel unnatural to you. After all, this is not how you talk to your friends or participate in a classroom discussion. Remember, though, that public speaking is not the same as talking. It's prepared and formal. It demands more of you. In a conversation, it might not be important to be memorable; your goal might merely be to maintain a friendship. But in a speech, when you expect the audience to pay attention, you must make the speech memorable.

Make It Relevant and Useful

When thinking about your topic, it is always very important to keep your audience members center stage in your mind. For instance, if your speech is about air pollution, ask your audience to imagine feeling the burning of eyes and lungs caused by smog. This is a strategy for making the topic more real to them, since it may have happened to them on several occasions, and even if it hasn't, it easily could. If your speech is about Mark Twain, instead of simply saying that he was very famous during his lifetime, remind your audience that he was so prominent that their own great-grandparents likely knew of his work and had strong opinions about it. In so doing, you've connected your topic to their own forebears.

Personalize Your Content

Giving a human face to a topic helps the audience perceive it as interesting. If your topic is related to the Masai rite of passage into manhood, the prevalence of drug addiction in a particular locale, the development of a professional filmmaker, or the treatment of a disease, putting a human face should not be difficult. To do it, find a case study you can describe within the speech, referring to the human subject by name. This conveys to the audience that these processes happen to real people.

It is best to use a real case study and not make one up. Using a fictional character without letting your audience know that the example is hypothetical is a betrayal of the listener's trust and, hence, is unethical.



Figure 13.1.5: Masai Tribe people in Masai Mara, Kenya, dance to welcome visitors. Giving a human face to topics that might seem unusual to us makes them more relatable and interesting. (CC-BY-SA 4.0; Joseph Danny via Wikimedia Commons)

Key Takeaways

- One important reason for informative speaking is to provide listeners with information so that they can make up their own minds about an issue.
- Informative speeches must be accurate, clear, and interesting for the listener.
- Strategies to make information clear and interesting to an audience include adjusting the complexity of your information to the audience, avoiding jargon, creating concrete images, and limiting information to what is most relevant, as well as making information memorable through language or personalization.
- An effective informative speech must achieve accuracy, clarity, and interest, which requires careful research from credible sources and regular updating of information.
- Informative speaking avoids expressing personal opinions; even when addressing controversial topics, speakers should present all sides fairly and allow the audience to form their own judgments.

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13.2: Choosing Informative Topics

Narrowing the List of Topics

For some speakers, deciding on a topic is one of the most difficult parts of informative speaking. The following section discusses several categories of topics that you might use for an informative presentation. Following this, we will discuss how you might structure your speech to address potential audience difficulties in understanding your topic or information.



Figure 13.2.1: Two men at Nigeria's Ahmadu Bello University brainstorm ideas for a presentation. (CC BY NC-SA 4.0; Inyor4mr via Wikimedia Commons)

Objects

The term “objects” encompasses many topics we might not ordinarily consider to be “things.” It’s a category that includes people, institutions, places, substances, and inanimate things. The following are some of these topics:

Topics About Objects

- Mitochondria
- Dream catchers
- Sharks
- Hubble telescope
- Seattle’s Space Needle
- Malta
- Silicon chip
- Spruce Goose
- Medieval armor
- DDT insecticide
- Soy inks
- NAACP



Figure 13.2.2: A pink and green dream catcher, believed by Indigenous People to have the power to capture negative dreams and protect the sleeping individual. Dream catchers would serve as an example of a topic about objects, which are a popular category among students for informative speeches, because the choices are abundant. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Priyanshi18shah via Wikimedia Commons)

You will need to narrow your topic to a specific object because it is virtually impossible for any speaker to cover every aspect of a broad topic in a single speech. In most cases, there are choices about how to narrow the topic. Here are some specific purpose statements that reflect ways of narrowing a few of those topics:

- To inform the audience about the role of soy inks in reducing toxic pollution
- To inform the audience about the current uses of the banned insecticide DDT
- To inform the audience about what we've learned from the Hubble telescope
- To inform the audience about the role of the NAACP in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- To describe the significance of the gigantic Spruce Goose, the wooden airplane that launched an airline

These specific purposes reflect a narrow but interesting approach to each topic. These purposes are precise, and they should help you maintain your focus on a narrow but deep slice of knowledge.

People

This category applies both to specific individuals and to roles. People are a popular topic among students for informative speeches as well as persuasive speeches. The resulting speech for each category is notably different in content and delivery. The following are some of these topics:

Topics About People:

- Dalai Lamas
- Astronauts
- Tsar Nicholas II
- Ketanji Brown Jackson
- Mata Hari
- Catherine the Great
- Navajo code talkers
- Mahatma Gandhi
- Jackie Robinson
- Madame Curie
- Leopold Mozart
- Aristotle
- The Hemlock Society

- Sonia Sotomayor
- Jack the Ripper



Figure 13.2.3: Former Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg remains a popular subject for speeches about people. (Public Domain; Supreme Court of the United States.Photographer: Steve Petteway via Wikimedia Commons)

There is a great deal of information about each one of these examples. To narrow the topic or write a thesis statement, it's important to recognize that your speech should not be a biography or timeline of someone's life. If you attempt to deliver a comprehensive report of every important event and accomplishment related to your subject, then nothing will seem any more important than anything else. To capture and hold your audience's interest, you must narrow your focus on a feature, event, achievement, or secret about your human topic.

Here are some purpose statements that reflect a process of narrowing:

- To inform the audience about the training program undergone by the first US astronauts to land on the moon
- To inform the audience about how a young Dalai Lama is identified
- To inform the audience about why Gandhi was regarded as a mahatma, or "great heart."
- To inform the audience about the extensive scientific qualifications of modern midwives

Without a limited purpose, you will find, with any of these topics, that there's simply too much to say. Your purpose statement will be a strong decision-making tool about what to include in your speech.

Events

An event can be something that occurred only once or an event that is repeated. Events can be a popular topic, thanks in part to the resurgence they often see on social media. The following are some of these topics:

Topics About Events

- The murder of Emmett Till
- The Iditarod Dogsled Race
- The Industrial Revolution
- The discovery of the smallpox vaccine
- The Bikini Atoll atomic bomb tests
- The Bay of Pigs
- The Super Bowl
- The Academy Awards



Figure 13.2.4: Mourners weep at the funeral of Emmett Till. Historic events are often revisited on social media, which, in turn, has contributed to a resurgence in speech classes. (CC0 1.0; Dave Mann via Wikimedia Commons)

Again, we find that any of these topics must be carefully narrowed to build a coherent speech. Failure to do so will result in a shallow speech. Here are a few ways to narrow the purpose:

- To explain how the murder of Emmett Till helped energize the civil rights movement
- To describe how the Industrial Revolution affected the lives of ordinary people
- To inform the audience about the purpose of the Iditarod dog sled race

There are many ways to approach any of these and other topics, but again, you must emphasize an important dimension of the event. Otherwise, you run the risk of producing a timeline in which the main point gets lost. In a speech about an event, you may use Helen's chronological order, but if you choose to do so, you can't include every detail. The following is an example:

Specific Purpose: To inform the audience about the purpose of the Iditarod dog sled race.

Central Idea: The annual Iditarod commemorates the heroism of Balto, the sled dog that led a dog team carrying medicine 1150 miles to save Nome from an outbreak of diphtheria.

Main Points

- Diphtheria broke out in a remote Alaskan town.
- Dogsleds were the only means of transportation for getting medicine.
- The Iditarod Trail was long, rugged, and under siege by severe weather.
- Balto the dog knew where he was going, even when the musher did not.
- The annual race commemorates Balto's heroism in saving the lives of the people of Nome.

In this example, you must explain the event. However, another way to approach the same event would be to describe it. The following is an example:

Specific Purpose: To describe the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

Central Idea: It's a long and dangerous race.

Main Points

- The 1150-mile, ten- to seventeen-day race goes through wilderness with widely spaced checkpoints for rest, first aid, and getting fresh dogs.
- A musher, or dogsled driver, must be at least fourteen years old to endure the rigors of severe weather, exhaustion, and

loneliness.
- A musher is responsible for his or her own food, food for twelve to sixteen dogs, and for making sure they don't get lost.
- Reaching the end of the race without getting lost, even in last place, is considered honorable and heroic.
- The expense of participation is greater than the prize awarded to the winner.

By now, you can see that there are various ways to approach a topic while avoiding an uninspiring timeline. In the example of the Iditarod race, you could alternatively frame it as an Alaskan tourism topic, or you could emphasize the enormous staff involved in first aid, search and rescue, dog care, trail maintenance, event coordination, financial management, and registration.

Concepts

Concepts are abstract ideas that exist independent of whether they are observed or practiced, such as the example of social equality that follows. Concepts can include hypotheses and theories. The following are some of these topics:

Topics About Concepts

- The glass ceiling
- Ethnocentrism
- Honor codes
- Autism
- Karma
- Wellness
- Fairness theory
- Bioethics
- The American Dream
- Social equality

Here are a few examples of specific purposes developed from the examples:

- To explain why people in all cultures are ethnocentric
- To describe the Hindu concept of karma
- To distinguish the differences between the concepts of wellness and health
- To show the resources available in our local school system for children with autism
- To explain three of Dr. Stephen Suranovic's seven categories of fairness

Here is one possible example of a way to develop one of these topics:

Specific Purpose: To explain why people in all cultures are ethnocentric.

Central Idea: There are benefits to being ethnocentric.

Main Points

1. Ethnocentrism is the idea that one's own culture is superior to others.
2. Ethnocentrism strongly contributes to positive group identity.
3. Ethnocentrism facilitates the coordination of social activity.
4. Ethnocentrism contributes to a sense of safety within a group.
5. Ethnocentrism becomes harmful when it creates barriers.

In an example of a concept about which people disagree, you must represent multiple and conflicting views as fully and fairly as possible. For instance:

Specific Purpose: To expose the audience to three different views of the American Dream.

Central Idea: The American Dream is a shared dream, an impossible dream, or dangerous, depending on the perspective of the individual.

Main Points

1. The concept of the American Dream describes a state of abundant well-being in which an honest and productive American can own a home, bring up a family, work at a permanent, well-paying job with benefits, and retire in security and leisure.
2. Many capitalists support the social pattern of working hard to deserve and acquire the material comforts and security of a comfortable life.
3. Many sociologists argue that the American Dream is far out of reach for the 40 percent of Americans at the bottom of the economic scale.
4. Many environmentalists argue that the consumption patterns that accompany the American Dream have resulted in the depletion of resources and the pollution of air, water, and soil.

Processes

If your speech topic is a process, your goal should be to help your audience understand it or be able to perform it. In either instance, processes involve a predictable series of changes, phases, or steps.

Topics About Processes

- Soil erosion
- Cell division
- Physical therapy
- Volcanic eruption
- Paper recycling
- Consumer credit evaluations
- Scholarship money searches
- Navy SEAL training
- Portfolio building
- The development of Alzheimer's disease

For some topics, you will need presentation aids to make your meaning clear to your listeners. Even in cases where you don't absolutely need a presentation aid, one might be useful. For instance, if your topic is evaluating consumer credit, instead of just describing a comparison between two different interest rates applied to the same original amount of debt, it would be helpful to show a graph of the difference. This might also be the sort of topic that would strongly serve the needs of your audience before they find themselves in trouble. Since this will be an informative speech, you must resist the impulse to tell your listeners that one form of borrowing is good and another is bad; you must simply show them the difference in numbers. They can reach their own conclusions.

Organizing your facts is crucially important when discussing a process. Every stage of a process must be clear and understandable. When two or more things occur at the same time, as they might in the development of Alzheimer's disease, it is important to make it clear that several things are occurring at once. For example, as plaque is accumulating in the brain, the patient is likely to begin exhibiting various symptoms.

Here's an example of the initial steps of a speech about a process:

Specific Purpose: To inform the audience about how to build an academic portfolio.

Central Idea: A portfolio represents you and emphasizes your best skills.

Main Points

1. A portfolio is an organized selection containing the best examples of the skills you can offer an employer.
2. A portfolio should contain samples of a substantial body of written work, print and electronically published pieces, photography, and DVDs of your media productions.
3. A portfolio should be customized for each prospective employer.
4. The material in your portfolio should be consistent with the skills and experience in your résumé.

In a speech about the process of building a portfolio, there will be many smaller steps to include within each of the main points.

For instance, creating separate sections of the portfolio for different types of creative activities, writing a table of contents, labeling and dating your samples, making your samples look attractive and professional, and other steps should be inserted where it makes the most sense, in the most organized places, to give your audience the most coherent understanding possible.

You've probably noticed that there are topics that could be appropriate in more than one category. For instance, the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helen's could be legitimately handled as an event or as a process. If you approach the eruption as an event, most of the information you include will focus on human responses and the consequences on humans and the landscape. If you approach the eruption as a process, you will be using visual aids and explanations to describe geological changes before and during the eruption. You might also approach this topic from the viewpoint of a person whose life was affected by the eruption. This should remind you that there are many ways to approach most topics, and because of that, your narrowing choices and your purpose will be the important foundation determining the structure of your informative speech.

Developing Your Topic for the Audience

One issue to consider when preparing an informative speech is how best to present the information to enhance audience learning. Katherine Rowan suggests focusing on areas where your audience may experience confusion and using the likely sources of confusion as a guide for developing the content of your speech. Rowan identifies three sources of audience confusion: difficult concepts or language, difficult-to-envision structures or processes, and ideas that are difficult to understand because they are hard to believe (Rowan, 1995). The following subsections will discuss each of these and will provide strategies for dealing with each of these sources of confusion.

Difficult Concepts or Language

Sometimes, audiences may have difficulty understanding information because of the concepts or language used. For example, they may not understand what the term "organic food" means or how it differs from "all-natural" foods. If an audience is likely to experience confusion over a basic concept or term, Rowan suggests using an elucidating explanation composed of four parts. The purpose of such an explanation is to clarify the meaning and use of the concept by focusing on essential features of the concept.

The first part of an elucidating explanation is to provide a typical exemplar, or example, that includes all the central features of the concept. If you are talking about what a fruit is, an apple or an orange would be a typical exemplar.

The second step Rowan suggests is to follow up the typical exemplar with a definition. Fruits might be defined as edible plant structures that contain the seeds of the plant.

After providing a definition, you can move on to the third part of the elucidating explanation: providing a variety of examples and nonexamples. Here is where you might include less typical examples of fruit, such as avocados, squash, or tomatoes, and foods, such as rhubarb, which is often treated as a fruit but is not by definition.

Fourth, Rowan suggests concluding by having the audience practice distinguishing examples from nonexamples. In this way, the audience leaves the speech with a clear understanding of the concept.

Difficult-to-Envision Processes or Structures

A second source of audience difficulty in understanding, according to Rowan, is a process or structure that is complex and difficult to envision. The blood circulation system in the body might be an example of a difficult-to-envision process. To address this type of audience confusion, Rowan suggests a quasi-scientific explanation, which starts by giving a big-picture perspective on the process. Presentation aids or analogies might help give an overview of the process. For the circulatory system, you could show a video or diagram of the entire system or make an analogy to a pump. Then you can move to explaining relationships among the components of the process. Be sure when you explain relationships among components that you include transition and linking words like "leads to" and "because" so that your audience understands relationships between concepts. You may remember the childhood song describing the bones in the body with lines such as, "the hip bone's connected to the thigh bone; the thigh bone's connected to the knee bone." Making the connections between components helps the audience to remember and better understand the process.

Difficult to Understand Because it's Hard to Believe

A third source of audience confusion, and perhaps the most difficult to address as a speaker, is an idea that's difficult to understand because it's hard to believe. This often happens when people have implicit, but erroneous, theories about how the world works. For example, the idea that science tries to disprove theories is difficult for some people to understand; after all, shouldn't the purpose of science be to prove things? In such a case, Rowan suggests using a transformative explanation. A transformative explanation begins by discussing the audience's implicit theory and showing why it is plausible. Then you move to showing how the implicit theory is limited and conclude by presenting the accepted explanation and why that explanation is better. In the case of scientists disproving theories, you might start by talking about what science has proven (e.g., the causes of malaria, the usefulness of penicillin in treating infection) and why focusing on science as proof is a plausible way of thinking. Then you might show how the science of proof theory is limited by providing examples of ideas that were accepted as "proven" but were later found to be false, such as the belief that diseases are caused by miasma, or "bad air," or that bloodletting cures diseases by purging the body of "bad humors." You can then conclude by showing how science is an enterprise designed to disprove theories and that all theories are accepted as tentative in light of existing knowledge.

Rowan's framework is helpful because it keeps our focus on the most important element of an informative speech: increasing audience understanding about a topic.

Ethics

Honesty and credibility must underscore your presentation; otherwise, they betray the trust of your listeners. Therefore, if you choose a topic that turns out to be too difficult, you must decide what will serve the needs and interests of the audience. Shortcuts and oversimplifications are not the answer.

Being ethical often involves a surprising amount of work. In the case of choosing too ambitious a topic, you have some choices:

- Narrow your topic further.
- Narrow your topic differently.y
- Reconsider your specific purpose.
- Start over with a new topic.

Your goal is to serve the interests and needs of your audience, whoever they are.Source,. And whether you believe they already know something about your topic.

Key Takeaways

- A variety of different topic categories are available for informative speaking.
- One way to develop your topic is to focus on areas that might be confusing to the audience. If the audience is likely to be confused about language or a concept, an elucidating explanation might be helpful. If a process is complex, a quasi-scientific explanation may help. If the audience already has an erroneous implicit idea of how something works, then a transformative explanation might be needed.
- Visuals, graphs, diagrams, or other aids can clarify complex ideas, processes, or comparisons, helping the audience grasp information that might otherwise be abstract or confusing. Organizing facts logically is especially important when explaining processes with multiple steps or simultaneous events.
- Speakers should anticipate three main difficulties: complex concepts/language, hard-to-envision processes or structures, and ideas that are difficult to believe. Strategies like elucidating explanations, quasi-scientific overviews, analogies, and transformative explanations can help make challenging content understandable.
- Honesty, credibility, and serving the audience's interests are essential. Avoid oversimplifying or misleading information. If a topic is too complex, narrow it, adjust the purpose, or select a new topic to ensure the speech benefits the audience effectively.

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13.3: Creating Your Thesis

How to Begin

When you're preparing to speak, finding an argument, perspective, or topic can feel overwhelming. "Where should I start?" "What do I care about?" "Why should the audience care?" These are all questions that you're likely to encounter.



Figure 13.3.1: A student struggles with the questions that plague most speakers, such as: "Where to start?" (CC 0; Jan Vašek via Pixabay)

These are important queries, and we don't want to downplay the difficulty in selecting an argument and formulating an idea that is worthwhile to the audience. Finding an argument that fits the context, is timely, well-reasoned, and interesting can be difficult. Oftentimes, when we sit down to think about ideas, brainstorm, and jot down some insights, our page feels oddly blank. "What should we talk about?" and "Where do we start?" are common questions that race through our minds. You might experience this, too, and feel confused about how to begin selecting an argument or sorting through information to locate an interesting idea.

When you begin searching for an argument, you aren't alone; you have tons of informational avenues that can direct you to different topics that are relevant in the world.

In fact, you're experiencing interesting information all the time! You are constantly absorbing, sorting, and curating information and ideas. Think about your social media accounts. If you're like us, you likely scroll through and click on articles that seem unique or insightful; you "like" or comment in response to posts that draw you in. There's a constant flow of information (and potential speech topics).

In this chapter, we explore how to select and formulate the main argument, also called the **thesis**, for a speech. It's uncommon to snap our fingers and know exactly what our argument will be, and that's OK! This chapter works to funnel you through brainstorming and searching toward writing a clear and narrow argument that is specific to your public speaking context. It's our goal to encourage curiosity, and we hope that you'll accept the challenge.

By the end of this chapter, you will have deeper critical thinking skills that lead you from broad topic ideas to specific arguments and thesis statements. Before brainstorming a topic, however, you must zero in on the context.

Context is Key

Your context should always guide your preparatory process, including selecting an argument to present. The **context** defines why you're there, how long you're there for, when, and with whom.

By answering the “Why," as in: “Why am I here?” – you can determine your general purpose for speaking, which may be informing, persuading, or entertaining. While arguments can often be adapted to fit many purposes, it’s always important to begin any project by knowing the parameters and overarching goals – in this case, why am I speaking? For example, are you trying to:

- Solve a problem
- Reduce uncertainty
- Increase awareness
- Honor someone

Selecting a final topic before considering the context means “placing the cart before the horse,” so to speak. Your context will inform the general purpose, which will guide your specific argument.

It’s important, too, to remain aware of the other contextual factors, particularly the time. How much time you have to speak will influence how broad or narrow your argument can be. If you have 3 minutes, for example, you must have a specific and focused takeaway for the audience within that short amount of time. Alternatively, a 20-minute speech provides more flexibility. There may be some ideas or arguments that aren’t feasible within certain time constraints.

Context also refers to the broader historical and cultural context. Being aware of larger cultural conversations and dialogues can assist in selecting arguments that are timely and relevant for your audience. In other words, it allows you to find information that is having an impact on your community/communities right now, and that information becomes significant to share.

If you aren’t sure how to locate such arguments, stay tuned! Below, we tackle brainstorming as a mechanism to locate potential arguments.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is the process and practice of searching to find ideas or information. When you brainstorm, you are generating ideas to overcome a barrier or confront a problem. The problem you’re confronting is:

“What can I talk about that will sustain the audience’s attention and have an impact?” For speeches, brainstorming assists in locating and narrowing information to an accurate idea that supports the development of a well-reasoned argument.



Figure 13.3.2: Sticky notes created by WOW! Sticky notes can help participants organize their ideas during brainstorming sessions. (CC BY SA-4.0; Jsm0925 via Wikimedia Commons)

As mentioned in the introduction, you are already sorting through vast amounts of information daily. We are confronted with so many ideas, research findings, memes, tweets, advertisements, and podcasts (to name a few); we develop personal strategies to find information that is meaningful and worthwhile to us.

Brainstorming is a practice that formalizes that sorting process. It asks you to make those choices more deliberately and consciously. The key to successful brainstorming is openness–you must be open to finding, locating, and narrowing down information.

Arguments Are Advocacies

Topic selection and argument construction are key parts of formulating an advocacy. While arguing, and arguments are most often associated with persuasion, they have a role in informative speaking as well. Informative speeches are meaningful and impactful communication acts. When you speak, you are supporting an idea, cause, or policy, which is **advocacy.** You should approach brainstorming purposefully and intentionally with a framework in mind: "What I select matters." Because what you select matters.

In addition, your advocacy may begin broadly, but your goal is to tailor that advocacy down to a workable argument. It's helpful to think about your topics as orbiting an advocacy. For example, you may be interested in environmental advocacy, where environmentalism is a large and broad topic. But "environmentalism" isn't a workable speech argument–it's way too big! With research, critical thinking, and expertise, you'll narrow that broad advocacy umbrella down to a workable argument – a thesis statement – and craft the remainder of your speech with that specific argument in mind.

We suggest two broad brainstorming strategies, and let's start with the first: exploratory research.

Exploratory Research

Exploratory research encompasses brainstorming strategies that spark curiosity. When you explore, you are going on an adventure, and exploratory research is similar. You are sorting information to find broad topics or ideas (that you'll narrow down later). Conducting a personal inventory and exploring online are two great exploratory brainstorming strategies.

Personal Inventory

An adage states, "Write about what you know."

To write what you know, begin by conducting a **personal inventory** – a process of tracking ideas, insights, or topics that you have experience with or interest in**.** Retail stores do regular inventories to know what is actually stocked in the business. You have much more going on in your brain and background than you can be conscious of at any one time. Being asked the right kinds of prompts can help you find ideas. Look over Table 13.3.1 for some prompt questions when conducting a personal inventory.

Table 13.3.1: Personal Inventory

Personal Inventory	Ideas and Insights
What is your major?	*What are the things that you experience that give you pause?*
What are your hobbies?	*What unique skills do you possess?*
What online sites do you commonly click through?	*What social problems interest you?*
What goals do you have?	*What communities do you belong to? What have they been discussing?*
What are the barriers that you've experienced in working toward those goals?	*What kind of values do you hold dear?*
What's your major?	*What community problems have caught your attention?*

Personal Inventory	Ideas and Insights
What are your hobbies?	*What posts do you commonly share?*

This may not be an inventory that you complete in one sitting. In fact, it's worthwhile to jot down a few things that catch your attention throughout the day or for a series of days. Once complete, the inventory may seem long and intrusive, but digging a little deeper may help you find ideas and directions that are unique to you. Generating your list based on these questions and prompts will get you excited about your topic and talking about it to your audience.

Let's work through a hypothetical application of the personal inventory. Imagine brainstorming for a speech, and you write the following in response to Table 13.3.1

Major: Economics (for now)
Goals: Complete my degree with honors; travel to Brazil
Barriers to achieving those goals: Procrastination, assigned class schedules, expensive college and fees, and problems with gaining a visa

As you look over these broad ideas, your next step is to highlight topics that pique your interest or are a priority. You might highlight "expensive college" as a barrier that could prohibit you from completing your economics degree on time. After all, if you are unable to afford college (or are worried about loans), you may take a semester break or drop out. Also, as an economics major, you become more interested in exploring college affordability.

As the personal inventory implies, good speech topic ideas often begin with the speaker. After all, if a speaker is intrigued by an idea, that passion is more likely to translate to an audience. But it doesn't end there. Remember, we are just brainstorming! It's still necessary to research and read about a topic or problem from multiple viewpoints and sources. If we only begin from ourselves, we often fail to see or learn about different perspectives, other important areas, or problems. Exploring online can help in narrowing your topic and deciding if it's a relevant argument for your audience and community.

Explore Online

A second brainstorming technique is online exploration—searching digital information with an open mind. You can use your personal inventory as guidance, or, if you're stuck, you can read information online for ideas that spark curiosity. There are ample online locations to find an array of information, from Google News to Twitter.

When you search, look far and wide. It's common to search and seek out information that we're looking for, but brainstorming isn't about finding what you already know; It's about finding what you don't. Use different search engines and social media platforms for help.

As you search, skim. Remember that this is an exploratory phase (we'll talk more about searching in-depth in Chapter 4), so you don't need to read every article that pops up on a search engine. Write down words. Write down phrases. Ask yourself questions about those words and phrases to determine how relevant and interesting they could be.

For example, if you continued brainstorming about "expensive college" – an idea on your hypothetical personal inventory—you might find a series of posts, articles, and insights that a) help you learn more and b) help narrow down the topic. You'd learn that, under the broad category of college affordability, there are a range of topics that influence students, including student loan interest rates, textbook costs, private loans, and the depletion of Pell grants. You could attack any of these issues, of course, but some are more complicated than others. Textbooks seem like they could be a potential topic. Perhaps you recently experienced purchasing expensive college textbooks. Perhaps you loaned a friend money after their textbook bill made it difficult to pay rent. After reflecting, books seem ripe for advocacy.

Whenever you are exploring a topic online, it is important to remember that if you have one good source, you probably have

several. The trick is being able to use that one good article to track down multiple sources. For example, a Vox article about textbooks, titled "The High Cost of College Textbooks, Explained," provides opportunities for more online exploration. Below is a list of ideas or concepts to click on or research in other tabs. Look for these in every article as you brainstorm. Pretty soon, you will probably have a dozen or more tabs open, meaning you will have much more expertise and a deeper understanding of your topic.

Try This 13.3.1 Sources Are Everywhere

- **Hyperlinks:** Journalists do not cite their sources with footnotes, endnotes, or internal citations as you do for class. Instead, they hyperlink their sources to make it easier for you to track down their evidence.
- **Big Ideas:** You can easily Google the main topics of an article to see how other people are talking about it. This will allow you to see more than one perspective on a topic and to cross-check your original article against other writers.
- **From the author to the people:** When it comes to the author and the people that they talked to or about, sources can be easily located. They talked to or about: Look up people to read their credentials and determine if they are qualified to write or talk about the relevant topic.
- **Jargon:** If you find any familiar words, look them up. This will help you understand the argument better and make certain the author actually knows what they are writing about. Plus, it will give you some words to use for mind-mapping.

Before we move further into narrowing and mapping our topic, let's conclude this section by busting a few myths about online information.

Myths About Online Information

Myth #1: Wikipedia is bad. You've likely heard that "you can absolutely not cite Wikipedia [in a formal essay or speech]." While yes, Wikipedia is a collaborative encyclopedia, meaning that anyone can technically add to its content, its pages can be useful for brainstorming. You might consider using Wikipedia in two ways.

- First, search Wikipedia for its internally cited material. If you've used Wikipedia recently, you know that the content includes references to other sources that validate the findings. Use those! The references help locate(often) credible sources for your own research on a topic.
- Second, use Wikipedia to clarify complex ideas. Because Wikipedia is a community-based and collaborative encyclopedia, technical language is commonly translated to allow better comprehension. If you aren't sure about an idea, search Wikipedia for help (but verify the information through other sources, too).

While we don't recommend using Wikipedia *as* a source, its content can direct you toward reputable research and clarify difficult concepts.

Myth #2: Information is neutral. It's easy to believe that, because something is published online, it's a neutral and reputable source. Sadly, that's not the case. In our digital information age, virtually anyone can be an author, which is a valuable concept. But it also reduces the reliability of information that's being posted.

- You've likely heard about "fake news," but we'll use the term **propaganda** – biased or misleading information that promotes a particular agenda. Propaganda is junk science, and it can't be trusted as reliable. For example, you might notice a meme that posts a Harriett Tubman quote in support of strict immigration reform. Digging deeper, you'd likely find that the quote was misrepresented or made up to support an anti-immigrant agenda.
- Advertising more subtly influences information. That's because many information sorting sites, including Google, use an algorithm that's specific to you. If you and a friend search for the same thing, your search results may differ, especially after the first page.

Does that mean you can't use Google? Not all all. But you should be aware that targeted sites may be rising to the top, and when you search, dig deep and search multiple pages.

Using a Mind Map

After conducting exploratory research to dig a little deeper, a mind map is a second brainstorming strategy to narrow and isolate

a topic. A **mind map** is a visual tool that allows you to chart and expand key topic ideas or concepts.

As you mind map, use the following tips:

- Start with a big idea.
- Break this big concept down into smaller ideas until you can't break them down anymore.
- Look up synonyms or words.
- Write down any words you find during your research to tap into the larger conversation.

Figure 13.3.3 is an example of a mind map based on "college affordability." You can see how the topic narrowed from college affordability to textbook costs. The mind map also includes words that were used in the *Vox* article, such as "open textbooks." Jotting down ideas and language that are used in source information will provide insight into common wording used by topic experts. Keep in mind, if you do not like mind maps, make a list or develop some alternative method, but make certain to keep track of everything.

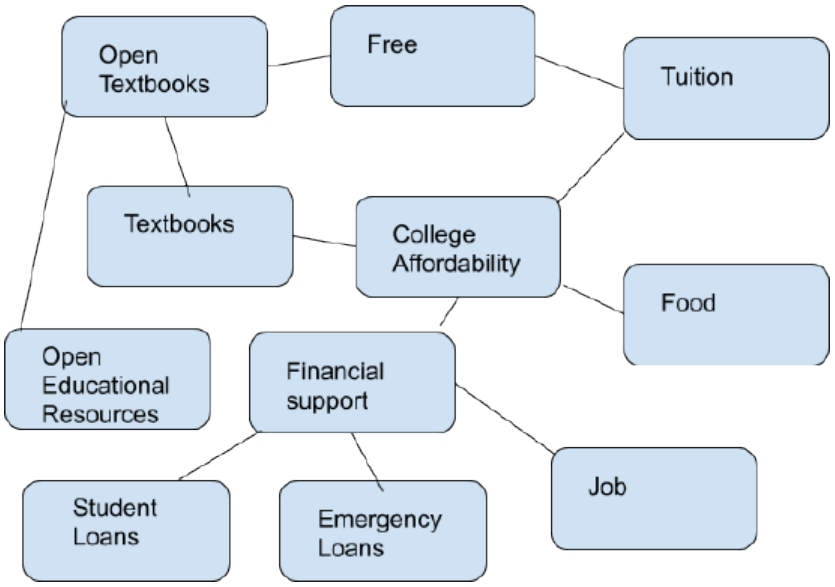


Figure 13.3.3: College Affordability Mind Map. The figure shows several rectangles, arranged in a starburst formation, each with a different subject listed on it. Each of these subjects serves as an idea from which to construct and develop speeches. Alternative description of the image. (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0; Meggie Mapes, via Speak Out, Call In: Public Speaking As Advocacy)

You can create a mind map using a program like Popplet, PowerPoint, Word, or Google Docs. Even a blank sheet of paper and a pencil will work, though.

As you expand topics through a mind map, the narrower your argument becomes. Instead of a broad approach to "college affordability," you now have options to explore textbook costs, open textbooks, or open educational resources.

We promise this will not be a waste of your time. Writing down your ideas and thoughts will help you identify keywords for further searching, so you won't have to come up with words on the fly. As you search, you can easily scratch off words that fail to get you any information, mark the words that seem to get you exactly what you need, or jot down new words you stumble across as you search. All of this will save you time in the long run because it won't leave you searching for just the right word or trying the wrong word over and over.

Formulating a Specific Purpose Statement

After identifying your general purpose (to inform, to persuade, or to entertain) and brainstorming key topic ideas, you can start to move in the direction of the specific purpose.

A **specific purpose statement** builds on your general purpose (such as to inform) and makes it more specific (as the name suggests). So, if you're giving a persuasive speech, your general purpose will be to persuade your audience about, for example, the rising cost of textbooks. Written together, your specific purpose would read, "to persuade my audience to support campus

solutions to rising textbook costs."

Your general purpose and audience will influence how you write your specific purpose statement (see Table 13.3.2).

Table 13.3.2: Formulating the Purpose Statement

General Purpose	Audience	Topic
To inform	my audience	**about** the usefulness of scrapbooking to save a family's memories.
To persuade	a group of kindergarten teachers	**to** adopt a new disciplinary method for their classrooms.
To entertain	a group of executives	**by** describing the lighter side of life in "cubicle-ville."
To inform	community members	**about** the newly proposed swimming pool plans that have been adopted.
To persuade	my peers in class	**to** vote for me for class president.
To entertain	the guests attending my mother's birthday party	**by** telling a humorous story followed by a toast.

There are a few things to be mindful of before moving to your thesis. Be aware of these common pitfalls for writing specific-purpose statements.

Being Too Broad

Specific purpose statements sometimes try to cover far too much and are too broad. You are funneling a broad topic to a specific argument, so don't stop at the topic. Instead, ask, "Am I trying to do too much?"

Example 13.3.1 Topic That Is Too Broad

The following example is a very broad purpose statement:

To explain to my classmates the history of ballet.

This subject could result in a three-hour lecture, maybe even a whole course. You will probably find that your first attempt at a specific purpose statement will need refining.

Being More Specific

If the speaker is determined to cover the topic of ballet but has to work within a shorter time limit, they can still do so, provided they make a few small adjustments.

Example 13.3.2 Topics That Are More Specific

The examples below are much more specific and much more manageable, given the limited amount of time you will have:

To explain to my classmates how ballet came to be performed and studied in the U.S.
To explain to my classmates the difference between Russian and French ballet.
To explain to my classmates how ballet originated as an art form in the Renaissance.
To explain to my classmates the origin of the ballet dancers' clothing

Combination Of Broad And Specific Topics

Often, broadness is signaled by the use of “and,” where a specific statement is making two arguments.

Example 13.3.3 Topics That Are Broad And Specific

These examples cover two different topics:

To explain to my audience how to swing a golf club and choose the best golf shoes.
To persuade my classmates to be involved in the Special Olympics and vote to fund better classes for the intellectually disabled.

Too Specialized

The second problem with specific purpose statements is the opposite of being too broad; some specific purpose statements are so focused that they might only be appropriate for people who are already extremely interested in the topic or experts in a field. For example:

Example 13.3.4 Topics That Are Too Specialized

The following examples are so specialized that they might only appeal to specific groups of people:

To inform my classmates of the life cycle of a new species of lima bean (botanists, agriculturalists).
To inform my classmates about the Yellow 5 ingredient in Mountain Dew (chemists, nutritionists).
To persuade my classmates that JIF Peanut Butter is better than Peter Pan (organizational chefs in large institutions).

Formulating a Thesis

While you will not actually say your specific purpose statement during your speech, you will need to clearly state what your focus and main points are going to be. Your specific purpose is still not your main argument. It’s part of the funnel as you move to your main argument or thesis statement. A **thesis statement** is a single, declarative statement that outlines the purpose of your speech.

The point of your thesis statement is to reveal and clarify the main argument of your speech.

This part of the process is important because it’s where your topic becomes an argument. As we mentioned in the introduction, you will funnel your advocacy down to a specific argument that fits the context and goals of your speech.

However, as you are processing your ideas and approach, you may still be working on them. Sometimes those main points will not be clear to you immediately. As much as we would like these writing processes to be straightforward, sometimes we find that we have to revise our original approach. This is why preparing a speech the night before you give it is a really, really bad idea. You need lots of time for the preparation and then the practice.

Sometimes you will hear the writing process referred to as “**iterative.”** This word means, among other things, that a speech or document is not always written in the same order as the audience finally experiences it. You may have noticed that we have not said anything about the introduction of your speech yet. Even though that is the first thing the audience hears, it may be one of the last parts you actually compose. It is best to consider your speech flexible as you work on it, and to be willing to edit and revise. If your instructor asks you to turn the outline in before the speech, you should be clear on how much you can revise after that. Otherwise, it helps to know that you can keep editing your speech until you deliver it, especially while you practice.

Here are some examples that pair the general-purpose, specific-purpose statements, and thesis statements.

Try This 13.3.2 Frame Your Purposes and Your Thesis

Some speakers find it helpful to frame their speech by deciding three things: their general purpose, their specific purpose, and their thesis. Once this framework is decided, the speaker can build their speech. Consider the following examples:

General Purpose: To inform
Specific Purpose: To demonstrate to my audience the correct method for cleaning a computer keyboard.
Thesis: Your computer keyboard needs regular cleaning to function well, and you can achieve that in four easy steps.

General Purpose: To persuade
Specific Purpose: To persuade my political science class that labor unions are no longer a vital political force in the U.S.
Thesis: Although for decades in the twentieth century labor unions influenced local and national elections, in this speech I will point to how their influence has declined in the last thirty years.

General Purpose: To persuade
Specific Purpose: To motivate my audience to oppose the policy of drug testing welfare recipients.
Thesis: Many voices are calling for welfare recipients to have to go through mandatory, regular drug testing, but this policy is unjust, impractical, and costly, and fair-minded Americans should actively oppose it.

General Purpose: To inform
Specific Purpose: To explain to my fellow civic club members why I admire Representative John Lewis.
Thesis: John Lewnot writey admiration for his sacrifices during the Civil Rights movement and his service to Georgia as a leader and U.S. Representative.

Notice that in all of the above examples, neither the specific purpose nor the central idea ever exceeds one sent ce. You may divide your central idea and the preview of main points into two sentences or three sentences, depending on what your instructor directs. If your central i a consists of more than three sentences, then you are probably including too much information and taking up time that is needed for the body of the speech.

For thesis statements, remember the following few guidelines:

- Do not write the statement as a question.
- Use concrete language (“I admire Beyoncé for being a talented performer and businesswoman”), and avoid subjective terms or jargon that may not age well with evolving audiences (“My speech is about why I think Beyoncé is the GOAT”) or acronyms (“PLA is better than CBE for adult learners ”)

Remember that your thesis statement cements your main argument – it’s the foundation for building the speech. A clear and focused thesis statement for the speech, and we’ll continue building the research and content around your argument.

Think About This 13.3.3 Case Studies in Specific Purposes and Thesis Statements

Case Study One: Mitchell is taking a Fundamentals of Speech course in his second year of college. As a member of the college’s tennis team, he wants to speak on his favorite subject, tennis. He is assigned an informative speech that should be seven minutes long and use four external sources (other than his own experience). He realizes off the bat that he knows a great deal about the subject as far as how to play and be good at it, but not much about the history or origins, or the international impact of the sport. He brainstorms a list of topics: 1. Famous tennis players 2. Rules of tennis 3. How to start playing tennis 4. How to buy or choose equipment for tennis 5. Why tennis is a great sport 6. Tennis organizations 7. Where tennis came from 8. Dealing with tennis injuries 9. Tennis and the Olympics 10. Famous tennis tournaments—grand slam events

However, he also wants to be sure that his audience is not bored or confused. His instructor gives him a chance to get in a small group and have four of his classmates give him some ideas about the topics. He finds out no one in his group has ever played tennis, but they do have questions. He knows that everyone in his class is 18-24 years old, single, has no children, is enrolled in college, and all have part-time jobs.

Critique Mitch's brainstorming topics based on what you know. What should he do? Can you come up with a good, specific starting purpose?

Case Study Two: Neha is required to give a 5- to 6-minute presentation as part of a job interview. The interview is for a position as public relations and social media director of a nonprofit organization that focuses on nutrition in a five-county region near her home. There will be five people in her audience: the president of the organization, two board members, the office manager (who is also the Human Resources director), and a volunteer. She has never met these people. Neha has a college degree in public relations, so she knows her subject. She does as much research on the organization as she can and finds out about its use of social media and the Internet for publicity, marketing, and public relations. It does have a Facebook page, but it is not utilizing it well. It does not have any other social media accounts.

What would you suggest for Neha? Here are some questions to consider. Should she be persuasive, informative, or inspiring? (General purpose) What should be her specific content area? How can she answer the two questions of the value of her topic to the audience, and why would the audience think she is credible?

Key Takeaways

- Your specific purpose defines the focus of your speech and what you intend to achieve, but it is not the main argument.
- Speech preparation is often non-linear. You may write your introduction last or revise your main points multiple times. Allowing flexibility and time for revision is crucial—preparing a speech at the last minute undermines clarity and effectiveness.
- Brainstorm broadly using personal inventory and online exploration.
- Narrow broad advocacies into specific, workable arguments.
- Clearly defining your focus, main points, and thesis is critical before practice. Repeated practice allows you to refine, reorganize, and strengthen your argument so your delivery is coherent and persuasive.

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13.4: Choosing Your Main Points

The Body of The Speech

Speech organization is discussed in great detail in Chapter 10 of the text, where we examine how to organize and outline a speech. In truth, outlining can be a stress-inducing task, especially if you haven't yet decided what you wish to talk about in your speech. Once you have chosen your topic, the hurdle you must tackle is what the main points of your topic will be. This quandary doesn't just apply to speeches, but even to disagreements and arguments between people.

In this section of the chapter, we will focus on just the main points of the speech and how to decide on them.

Organizing information and reflecting on the best way to communicate an idea isn't unique to a public speech; we do it all the time in private. Consider the following scenario:

Example 13.4.1 Preparing to Argue

Scenario: Two friends, Anne and Stevie, have been dealing with interpersonal conflict. The two can't get along. Stevie decides that it's time to sit down and tell Anne how she is feeling, but first, she jots down some notes. "Where to start?" she thinks, and ponders how she wants to broach the topic.

- "Where should I begin? From the first time I was upset?"
- "Should I talk generally about the two main issues that keep bothering me?"
- "Which of these issues should I give more attention to?"

Impact: Stevie is trying to process the specific information she wants to convey to Anne. She is also processing how much attention she wants to devote to each of the areas she plans to discuss.

The same approach to organizing an in-person argument applies to preparing arguments for a speech. Having your information in a well-organized manner can make or break the audience's understanding of your content. In this chapter, we discuss ways to effectively categorize your information that will a) support your thesis statement and b) increase audience comprehension of that information. To accomplish these tasks, we will introduce various organizational patterns, provide tips for outlining, and offer strategies for crafting effective introductions and conclusions. Before you can select an organizational pattern, you should first work to group your information.

Grouping of Ideas



Figure 13.4.1: Items are grouped according to category for a yard sale. Similarly, ideas are grouped by category when creating main points. (CC0 1.0; ResaJoan via Wikimedia Commons)

Have you ever organized a garage sale? The first step, before putting up signs or pricing items, is to go through your closets and garage and create "piles" of items that you want to sell: children's items, tools, kitchen items, furniture, trash, etc. Researchers have found that "chunking" information, that is, the way it is grouped, is vital to audience understanding, learning, and retention of information (Beighly, 1954; Bodeia, Powers, & Fitch-Hauser, 2006; Daniels & Whitman, 1981).

As we listen, we have limits as to how many categories of information we can keep in mind. In public speaking, use approximately three categories to group your information. 2–3 main points–or groups–is a safe territory, and you should avoid having more than five main points for an audience to track.

"How does this work in practice?" you may be asking. "How do I group information to find my categories?"

Use your research and your brainstorming tactics. As you research, look at the articles and websites you read and say, "That information relates to what I read over here," and "That statistic fits under the idea of…" You are looking for similarities and patterns. Think back to the yard sale example–you would group according to customer interest and the purpose of each item. As you learn more about your topic and expand your expertise, the patterns and groups will become clearer.

Once you locate a pattern, that information can likely be grouped into your speech's main points. Return to your thesis statement and determine what groups are more suitable to support your specific purpose. If you continue to find more groups, you may want to limit and narrow your topic further.

Finally, because your audience will understand you better and perceive you as organized, you will gain more credibility as a speaker if you are organized, assuming you also have credible information and acceptable delivery (Slagell, 2013; Sharp & McClung, 1966).

Think About This 13.4.1 Grouping Ideas Helps Your Writing

Yun, Costantini, and Billingsley (2012) found a side benefit to grouping ideas, which is that it enables you to be an organized public speaker. Your writing skills will improve, specifically your organization and sentence structure. Working on your organization will increase your critical thinking skills all around.



Figure 13.4.2: Mushrooms and berries grouped by category are shown here at a roadside market in Varena, Lithuania. Grouping and organizing are purposeful in many areas. In communication, grouping is shown to help us become stronger public speakers. (CC BY 2.0; Philip Capper via Wikimedia Commons)

Value Applied to Main Points

In a garage sale, items are selected and grouped, and the final step is pricing them. An item is priced based upon several factors, including: its original cost, its value and worth to the original owner, and the value for the potential new owner. In a speech, a similar formula of value can be applied. Once the speaker determines the main points that they will focus on, they then need to determine how much time, effort, and energy they will spend on each of the main points. This is the **'value'** of the main points. To determine how much time, effort, and energy (value) you would like to devote to each of the main points, consider the following:

- How much material or resources are available on the topic chosen?
- How important is the topic to you?
- How important do you feel the topic will be to the audience?

Try This 13.4.2 Practice Assignment On Value For Main Points

You are presenting a speech about the Great Wall of China. Below are some possible Main Points about the topic:

- Historical Purpose of Construction
- Cultural Significance
- Role in Tourism
- Myths and Legends
- Fun Facts

1. Choose 2-3 of the above points to focus upon in your speech.
2. Decide how much value you wish to give each of these points.



Figure 13.4.3: The Great Wall of China makes a great informative speech topic because it offers many possible main ideas. Once the ideas are chosen, the speaker should decide how much value to apply to each topic. (CC BY-SA 3.0; CE Photo Uwe Aranas via Wikimedia Commons)

Key Takeaways

- Organizing ideas is essential–grouping information into 2–3 main points (no more than 5) improves audience understanding, retention, and speaker credibility.
- Use research and patterns to guide grouping: find similarities, connect ideas to the thesis, and narrow down excess points for clarity.
- These patterns guide which points become the main categories of your speech and ensure that each point reinforces your specific purpose and thesis.
- Assign value to main points—decide how much time and focus each point deserves based on available material, personal importance, and audience relevance.
- Clearly structured and logically grouped information not only improves audience comprehension but also increases your perceived credibility as a speaker, especially when combined with accurate research and strong delivery.

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13.5: Finding Your Delivery Style

Finding Your Voice

You are sitting in your new public speaking class, and your instructor has you pull a topic out of a box. The topic is: 'Energy Conservation," something you know only a little about. You sigh and ask yourself the big question: "How should I deliver this speech? There are many ways to deliver your speech. Each one has some specific things to know. We will cover impromptu speaking, extemporaneous speaking, manuscript speaking, memorized presentation, and finally, group or team presentations.

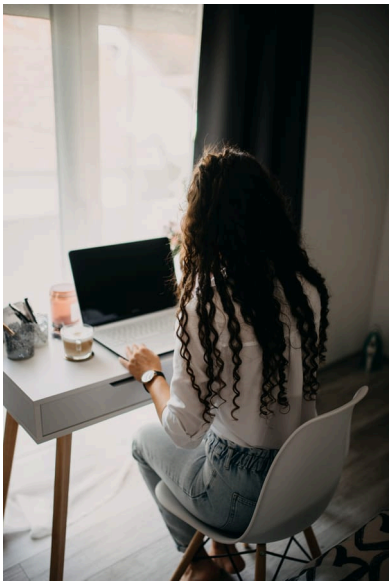


Figure 13.5.1: A student prepares the script for her upcoming speech. There are numerous ways to deliver a speech, and some of them require research and advanced preparation. (CC BY 2.0; Nenad Stojkovic via Wikimedia Commons)

Impromptu Speech

An **impromptu speech** is a presentation delivered with little or no preparation, usually in response to a prompt, question, or unexpected situation. Impromptu speaking is arguably the most common form of public speaking, as it occurs often in everyday professional and personal contexts. For this reason, a bit more attention and focus are being applied to this style of delivery in the following examples:

Example 13.5.1 Impromptu Speaking In Real Life

Often without warning, you might be called upon to give an impromptu presentation. Here are some possible scenarios:

- **Workplace presentations and updates**

"Ray, corporate will be here in five minutes. Please walk them through the proposal."

Ray is suddenly asked to present information clearly and confidently, even though he hasn't rehearsed.

- **Celebrations and social events**

"Pooja, would you like to make a toast to the partners, now?"

Pooja is one of the newest partners who is now being asked to speak warmly and spontaneously about the senior partners. despite not being given any advanced notice.

- **Training and Demonstrations**

"Excuse me? I think I want to buy this phone but I'm, but I'm not sure if it is right for me. Would you demonstrate how to log into Zoom with it?"

Shaian has been working in a store's electronics department for years, but every day, he encounters a new instance of having to explain or teach something to a customer, a group of customers, or corporate buyers on the spot.

- **Interactive discussions**

"Dr. Reddy, there will be a Q & A following the presentation, where you will be able to respond to questions from the audience."

Dr. Reddy is a respected doctor and professor of cardio-thoracic medicine, and she is used to impromptu discussion. However, in a Q&A format, she can't predict what will be asked, so she must be able to think quickly on her feet.

Impromptu speaking isn't limited to public speeches—it happens in meetings, celebrations, classrooms, interviews, and casual conversations. The common thread is being asked to respond in the moment, without scripted preparation.

Each of you reading this book will likely be called to give an impromptu speech in your life. It is that sudden and often unexpected call to give a speech that can get the adrenaline flowing. In public speaking classrooms and in speech clubs, a topic is offered, and you have a few minutes to prepare. What do you do?

Think About This 13.5.1 Pros and Cons of Impromptu Speaking

- **Pros**: It is great for building quick-thinking skills and confidence while teaching speakers how to adapt on the spot. Speakers who have practiced impromptu speaking often sound natural and authentic. These skills are especially useful in everyday situations like class discussions, job interviews, and workplace conversations.
- **Cons:** limited preparation time can lead to disorganized ideas, weaker arguments, or nervous delivery.

If you choose to use the impromptu speaking style for your next speech, consider applying the techniques outlined in the box below to strengthen your delivery. These strategies can help you capture your audience's attention, communicate your ideas effectively, and deliver a more confident presentation.

Steps to Success in an Impromptu Speech

- Breathe. Often, the call to give a speech will catch you off guard. Take a deep breath, fill your body with wonderful idea-giving, stress-reducing oxygen.
- Jot down a few quick ideas.
- If time, write down three solid points on the topic.
- Always figure out what your first three words will be. Never let your first words be, "Ok, so um".
- Plan your last sentence. If you do not have a plan to end and end strongly, you will find yourself rambling in search of an ending.

Pro Tips:

- To put the "Advanced" into your public speaking, use strong signposts. " I have three points to tell you today," "point one," "point two," "point three." "Now that I have given you three things to consider."
- As with all speaking, you should plan the first three words and the last three words to be strong and impactful.

Extemporaneous Speech

An **extemporaneous speech** is one where a speaker presents their speech with brief notes and careful practice. When doing this type of speech, you have written most of the main ideas of your speech in an outline, but the speech is delivered from brief notes. Most larger-stakes speeches in Communication Studies classes follow the extemporaneous speech model, as it mirrors situations outside the classroom, such as job interviews, workplace meetings, and casual presentations. The main ideas are developed, but the exact wording of the point is decided at the moment.

Here are a few examples of what constitutes an extemporaneous speech:

- Meryl Streep accepting an Academy Award
- Byron, the best man, toasts his best friend, the groom.
- Greta Thunberg presenting at a conference on Climate Change
- A Debate between two candidates at a Gubernatorial Election.

Extemporaneous speaking is an increasingly large component of the syllabi of most speech classes.

Think About This 13.5.2 Pros and Cons of Extemporaneous Speaking

- **Pros:** It tends to feel more natural. You can also prepare, plan, and practice. Not having every word scripted helps the speech feel fresh, alive, and real. In addition, the fact that every single word isn't written allows you wiggle room to add new information that seems relevant during the speech. It can also provide a buffer if you mess up. Since it is not scripted, it is easier to pick up and recover.
- **Cons:** Reliance on minimal notes can sometimes cause speakers to lose their place or forget key points.

If you choose to use the extemporaneous speaking style for your next speech, consider incorporating the techniques listed in the box below to enhance your delivery. These strategies can help you connect with your audience, build confidence, and create a more engaging presentation.

Steps to Success in an Extemporaneous Speech

- Think of a topic.
- Create a thesis statement/big idea.
- Research your topic.
- Outline your speech with a pattern appropriate to the topic and audience.
- Prepare clear preview and review statements at the opening and closing of your speech, where you state and restate the main purpose of your speech.
- Add a clear opening and closing statement.
- Create brief notecards from your outline.
- conversationally deliver the speech with good eye contact and body movement that enhances the topic and your credibility.

Pro Tips:

- Learn to master the **Elevator Speech**. This is a speech that one does within a short frame of time---essentially the time one would spend in an elevator with someone waiting to get off at their floor. Imagine you are taking an elevator ride with the person that you want to work for, give you a loan, do research with, partner with, and you have only one minute to convince them to talk with you.
- If you are in business, you should have your **corporate story** ready to go in a one- to two-minute speech. This speech should tell people who you are and what you believe.

Giving speeches at awards ceremonies can be a challenge even for seasoned performers. Some artists are naturally shy and feel uncomfortable speaking spontaneously, using their own words, as opposed to delivering lines written for them by a scriptwriter. Others feel completely at home improvising and speaking without prior planning or preparation. Then, some choose not to prepare speeches ahead of time at all, for fear of "jinxing" their chances of winning. In any of these scenarios, award recipients

must choose the option that suits their style best to deliver their acceptances.



Figure 13.5.2: Actress Anna Kendrick accepts an award at the Kids' Choice Awards. Acceptance Speeches at awards ceremonies can be examples of Extemporaneous speeches. (CC BY 3.0; NickRewind via Wikimedia Commons)

Memorized

In the early days of rhetoric, students would learn the art of speaking by memorizing the speeches of others and delivering them in public places. The Greek rhetoricians placed a great emphasis on the skill of memorization, and it is even considered one of the canons of rhetoric. The most common times you will see a speech memorized are for toast speeches and acceptance speeches. After all, it ruins the moment if you have a wine glass in one hand, toasting the groom, and your speech notes in the other. Memorizing your toast helps you to be in the moment. Additionally, many sales companies require their salespeople to memorize the company's sales script. These tested formulas often pay off in larger sales, so they expect associates to deliver word-for-word scripts in their sales presentations. Some politicians have memorized stump speeches or at least memorized answers to standard questions.

Here are a few examples of what constitutes a memorized speech:

- Theater performances where actors deliver scripted lines.
- Speech competitions where exact wording is judged.
- Political speeches, such as campaign addresses or inaugural speeches.
- Wedding toasts or other ceremonial remarks.
- Film and television roles require exact memorization of scripts.

While not as prevalent as it was in ancient Greece and Rome, memorized speeches are making a comeback. The biggest place of resurgence is on the TED stage. Chris Anderson, TED Talk curator, said, “Many of our best and most popular TED Talks have been memorized word for word.”

Think About This 13.5.3 Pros and Cons of Memorization

- **Pros:** You can plan every word, making the most of your speech time. The speaker also has stronger eye contact and audience engagement without reading notes. The overall impression is one of confidence and preparation.
- **Cons:** The risk of forgetting lines or "going blank," which can disrupt the speech. Memorized speeches can also sound robotic and unnatural if over-rehearsed. This type of speaking also limits flexibility based on audience reactions.

Some speakers may feel most comfortable using the memorized style of delivery, which allows for careful preparation and precise wording. The techniques outlined in the box below can help you maintain your audience’s attention and deliver your speech with

confidence and impact.

Steps to Success in a Memorized Speech

- Write the speech with a clear structure and polished wording.
- Break the speech into sections to make memorization easier.
- Practice regularly until the flow feels natural, not robotic.
- Rehearse with eye contact and gestures to engage the audience.
- Use keywords or mental cues to prevent forgetting lines.
- Time the delivery to ensure it fits within limits.
- Prepare a backup plan (like an outline) in case memory slips.

Pro Tips:

- Record and review yourself to catch pacing, tone, and naturalness.
- Practice in different settings so the speech feels comfortable anywhere.
- Rehearse with distractions (noise, movement, people walking by) to build focus.
- Use storytelling or emotion to make memorized lines sound authentic.

Some speakers feel it is best not to rely upon external tools, such as notecards or slides, for a variety of reasons, including cards getting mixed up, technology failure, or simply because they don't wish to feel too dependent on these sources. In such cases, speakers invest in their own memory and style to deliver their speeches.



Figure 13.5.3: A speaker delivers a memorized speech at an awards reception. (CC BY-2.0; Germanna via Wikimedia Commons)

Pamela Meyer, TED speaker, says,

> You haven't really memorized your talk thoroughly until you can do an entirely different activity that requires mental energy while giving your talk. Can you give your talk while measuring out the ingredients to make brownies?

The advantage of memorizing your speech is that you can plan every word, making the most of your speech time. Not having to look at notes frees you up to make good eye contact. The disadvantage of memorizing your speech is that you might not sound fresh, and your audience may perceive it more as a performance than a speech. Some speakers take on a machine-gun tone with their voice, giving away the memorized format. Sometimes eye contact is lost as the speaker reads off the "invisible notecard in the sky." The biggest disadvantage is that you risk going blank and forgetting what to say.

If you do decide to memorize your speech, be sure you know it well. TED curator, Chris Anderson, says, "Most people go through what I call the 'valley of awkwardness,' where they haven't quite memorized the talk. If they give the talk while stuck in that valley,

the audience will sense it … Getting past this point is simple, fortunately. It's just a matter of rehearsing enough times that the flow of words becomes second nature. It is important," according to Anderson," that you are not supposed to recite your talk; you're supposed to live it. Embody it. It must come across as if you are sharing these ideas for the first time."

Have a backup plan. If you decide to memorize your talk, keep a notecard in your pocket. If you forget what to say, pause and say, "Let me refer to my notes," and then pull them out, or pause for a moment and have a sip of water. No matter how well you know your talk, have a backup plan.

Memorization Techniques

Greek poet Simonides of Ceos is the first recorded user of the method of loci (loci being Latin for places). It is more recently called the **memory palace.** If you have ever watched BBC's Sherlock, you may have noticed that Sherlock uses the memory palace to remember things. Individuals who compete in memory competitions often use the memory palace or memory journey technique to remember long lists of items. Clemons Mayer memorized 1040 random digits by using a 300-point journey through his house, and Gary Shang used the technique to memorize pi to 65,536 digits. Brain scans of these super memorizers show that the region of the brain involved with spatial awareness is activated when using this technique.

So how does it work? In short, this technique suggests that you remember things in familiar spatial environments. For example, you might imagine each part of your speech being located in one of your kitchen cabinets. When you open the cabinet door, you can see the speech part. Speaker Irina Elena Antonescu found images and cut and pasted them on big sheets of paper in a kind of journey to help her memorize her talk. Heather Hanson learned from Grandmaster of Memory, Nishant Kasibhatla, how to think in pictures and how to find pictures that make sense to her in some way.



Figure 13.5.4: Classic games like Memory use the method of Loci, where people remember things in spatial environments. This same technique is often applied by speakers who memorize their speeches. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Tilanus via Wikimedia Commons)

Manuscript

Manuscript is a style of speaking where a speaker reads a speech word-for-word from a written script. This method of presentation is often used in formal settings, such as keynote addresses, where precise wording is important.

There will be times when reading from a manuscript is helpful. When giving a eulogy, you are likely to experience strong emotions. Having your words written out will be very helpful. Politicians often speak from manuscripts because there will be people weighing the meaning of each word. They often have speechwriters who take their ideas and make them sound fancy, and they likely have several people help them omit words that might offend.

The advantage of speaking with a manuscript is that you have your speech in front of you, allowing you to plan interesting wordplays and advanced language techniques. Another advantage of a manuscript is that you can share your speech with others.

For example, many people like to have written copies of the toast given to them at a special occasion, or family members might want to keep a copy of the eulogy. Politically speaking, a manuscript can help keep you on track and make sure you only say things you meant to say.

The disadvantage of a manuscript is that if not done properly, your speech may feel like merely an "essay with legs." Speaking from a manuscript is a skill. I would argue that it is one of the most difficult of all the delivery types because your goal is to read without appearing to read. It can be so tempting to lock your eyes on the page where it is safe and to never look up. Speakers who lack the skill of manuscript reading will have very little eye contact. It is usually sporadic and rarely long enough to lock eyes with anyone in the audience. Finally, it is very difficult for most people to make gestures when reading a manuscript. Many people run their hands down the page to keep their place, and worse yet, many speakers clutch both hands over the podium and never let go.

Think About This 13.5.4 Pros and Cons of Manuscript Speaking

- **Pros:** The speaker can deliver precise wording, which is useful for formal settings, such as political speeches or addressing boards. It also provides the speaker with a safety net, as having the full text reduces the chance of forgetting key points or going off-topic.
- **Cons:** Manuscript speaking is much less engaging for audience members, as speakers who read directly off of their notes have limited eye contact, which reduces the valuable connection with the audience. It can also appear stiff, as the speaker might be focused on the reading and not leave room for facial expression or vocal inflections.

Though less popular in modern times than in previous decades, some still choose to deliver their speeches in Manuscript style. If this style speaks to you, the box below offers some techniques to successfully incorporate this style for current audiences.

Steps to Success in Manuscript Speaking

- Write the script in a conversational style so it's easier to read aloud naturally.
- Mark the manuscript by using spacing, underlining, or pauses to remind yourself of pacing, emphasis, and tone.
- Rehearse several times, out loud, so you're familiar with the flow and don't sound like you're just "reading."
- Maintain eye contact by glancing up regularly to engage with the audience rather than keeping your eyes glued to the page.
- Control your pace by slowing down, using pauses, and varying tone to keep the audience interested.

Pro Tips:

- Highlight keywords to remind yourself where to stress important points.
- Use natural gestures so your delivery doesn't feel stiff.
- Print your notes in large font (or double-space) to make it easy to glance down quickly without losing your place.
- Practice with a podium and without one, so that you are comfortable with either physical setup on delivery day.
- Record yourself practicing to catch monotone or rushed delivery before the real presentation.

Group or Team Speech

Professors often use **group speeches** to get students to feel comfortable with one another, as well as confident, speaking in front of groups. However, many classroom group presentations often resemble a series of individual speeches rather than true teamwork. A professor from the Walton School of Business noted that in professional settings, effective group presentations require coordination, flexibility, and interaction among team members. Instead of simply taking turns, speakers build on each other's ideas, share responsibilities, and teams present as one smooth unit. Everyone plays to their strengths, speaks for different amounts of time, and interacts with each other's points. The result is a seamless flow that feels like one unified message.

An example of this approach involved two teachers who designed their presentation to function as a coordinated team effort. They alternated speaking roles, provided supporting points for one another, and used subtle signals with each other for slide transitions. One presenter engaged with the audience while the other prepared, handled technical areas, or introduced the next topic. This collaborative method demonstrated how group presentations can be more interactive, cohesive, and engaging when participants actively support and connect.

Think About This 13.5.4 Pros and Cons of Group Speaking

- **Pros:** They allow members to divide work according to their strengths while providing multiple perspectives and voices. Another advantage is that group speeches create valuable opportunities to practice teamwork and collaboration skills.
- **Cons:** The workload is unevenly distributed. Another disadvantage is ill-preparation, which can result in repeated information and awkward transitions if members are not well-coordinated. Finally, nonspeaking members may distract the audience, and one unprepared participant can weaken the entire presentation.

Group Speeches are sometimes used as a launching pad for students in Oral Communication classes, enabling the students to get acclimated to standing in front of an audience to speak, but with the added comfort of having a team with them. Despite the well-meaning intentions behind such speeches, they can be a challenge for some students, who find working with others to be stressful. Below is.Source,. a list of some techniques to ensure a smooth group-speech experience.

Steps to Success in a Group Speech

- Group presentations don't succeed when prepared last-minute; success requires sharing content early and practicing together.
- Nonspeaking group members must be purposeful and professional during presentations, as distracting behaviors or expressions can undermine the speaker and the group's credibility.
- Dead air during transitions loses audience attention, so groups should plan and practice smooth handoffs between speakers.
- Clear transitions between speakers keep group presentations seamless and connected.
- Slides should be consistent in style and completed early so all group members can review and practice with them.
- Presentations should begin with a strong hook and clear preview, and end with a thesis review and powerful closing statement.

Pro Tips:

- Plan roles clearly by assigning who covers which section, so there's no overlap or confusion.
- Practice as a team, scheduling time to rehearse together so that timing, tone, and flow feel cohesive.
- Stay engaged, even after you have delivered your part. Maintain eye contact with the audience, nod, or react appropriately instead of looking disengaged. Audience members notice everything!
- Balance speaking time– Ensure everyone has roughly equal opportunity, so no one dominates or gets overshadowed.
- Be ready to step in– Have a backup plan if someone forgets a part or stumbles.

Key Takeaways

- Different delivery styles suit different contexts. Whether impromptu, extemporaneous, memorized, manuscript, or group presentations, each method has its own strengths and challenges, and choosing the right one depends on the situation.
- The Memory Palace is a technique that suggests that you remember things in familiar spatial environments.
- Preparation and strategy are essential for success. From jotting quick notes for impromptu speaking to rehearsing with eye contact for memorized delivery, each style requires specific steps to sound natural, confident, and engaging.
- Connection with the audience matters most. Regardless of the method, strong eye contact, smooth transitions, natural gestures, and clear openings/closings are what keep the audience engaged and make a speech memorable.
- Success in group speeches relies heavily upon prior preparation and practice.

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13.6: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

This chapter introduces informative speaking, which is designed to educate and increase the audience's understanding of a specific topic. Unlike persuasive speeches, the goal is to influence audience members and change their opinions about a specific topic. Informative speaking aims to present clear, accurate, and well-organized information in an unbiased, neutral manner. Effective informative speeches require creativity, originality, relevance, and appropriate research, based on audience analysis. Speakers must define terms clearly, use concrete examples, and avoid overloading the audience with too much technical jargon to ensure that the audience is absorbing the material presented by the speaker.

The first section of the chapter explores the origins of informative speaking, highlighting its roots in Ancient Greece and Rome, where philosophers like Aristotle and Cicero emphasized teaching, reasoning, and clarity. Over time, informative speaking evolved in religious sermons, academic lectures, and civic forums, gaining importance as a distinct form of public communication. Key elements of informative speaking include clarity, accuracy, logical organization, and audience engagement, all of which help convey ideas effectively and maintain listener interest.

The chapter discusses five different speech delivery methods, which are: impromptu, extemporaneous, memorized, manuscript, and group speeches. Each of these styles of delivery is discussed in detail, and their advantages and challenges are highlighted. For example, impromptu speeches build quick-thinking skills but allow limited preparation; extemporaneous speeches offer flexibility while maintaining structure; memorized speeches maximize precision but risk sounding robotic; manuscript speeches provide exact wording for formal settings but can limit engagement; and group speeches require coordination for a cohesive presentation. The chapter offers strategies and pro tips for success with each style of delivery, such as practicing, planning openings and closings, and maintaining eye contact.

Finally, the chapter covers preparation and organization of informative speeches, including brainstorming ideas, choosing topics, narrowing the scope, writing purpose statements, and structuring content to minimize audience confusion. Effective speeches address difficult concepts, abstract terms, and technical language using examples, definitions, and audience-friendly explanations. Overall, the chapter highlights how informative speaking plays a vital role in sharing knowledge, promoting understanding, and engaging audiences clearly and compellingly.

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13.7: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 13

Figure 13.3.3: College Affordability Mind Map

The figure shows eleven interconnected rectangles, arranged in a starburst formation, each of which contains a problem related to college affordability. The top row has three interconnected rectangles: Open Textbooks, Free, and Tuition. The second row has three different interconnected rectangles: Textbooks, College Affordability, and Food. The third row has two interconnected rectangles: Open Educational Resources and Financial Support. The fourth and final row has three interconnected rectangles: Student Loans, Emergency Loans, and Jobs.

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13.9: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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13.9.1: Exercises

13.1: Informative Speech Goals

1. Identify concrete terms with which to replace the following abstractions: motivational, developmental, fair, natural, and dangerous.
2. Make a list of the arguments both for and against gun control. Make them informative, not persuasive. Your goal is to describe the debate that currently exists without taking a clear position.
3. How might you go about personalizing a speech about water conservation for your classroom audience?

13.2: Choosing Informative Speech Topics

1. Choose a topic such as “American Education in the Twenty-First Century.” Write a new title for that speech for each of the following audiences: financial managers, first-year college students, parents of high school students, nuns employed in Roman Catholic schools, psychotherapists, and teamsters. Write a specific purpose for the speech for each of these audiences.
2. Think about three potential topics you could use for an informative speech. Identify where the audience might experience confusion with concepts, processes, or preexisting implicit theories. Select one of the topics and outline how you would develop the topic to address the audience’s potential confusion.
3. Create a short topic list comprised of "objects."

13.3: Creating Your Thesis

1. What is the general purpose of the following topic: "A scientist who explains the results of a new climate change study to a community group"?
2. Brainstorm some main points for the topic: Technology in Education.
3. Provide an example of a Purpose Statement that is too broad. Now try narrowing it down.

13.4: Choosing Your Main Points

1. Pick a speech topic and list several ideas about it. How would you group these ideas into 2–3 main points, and why?
2. For each main point, decide how much time or focus it should get. How does this help the audience understand your speech better?
3. Pair up with someone and choose a topic. Individually come up with 3-5 groups for this topic. Compare your groups with your partner and discuss what made you choose these groups.

13.5 Finding Your Delivery Style

1. Create a short elevator speech trying to pitch an idea to a friend. How effective is this?
2. Scour the internet and find an example of a manuscript speech. Do you find this style engaging? Why or why not?
3. Partner up with a friend and provide a topic to one another. Set a timer for 1 minute and create an extemporaneous speech for each of your respective topics.

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- 16.2: Types of Informative Speeches by Anonymous is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 3.0. Original source: https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/public-speaking-practice-and-ethics.

13.9.2: Discussion Questions

13.1: Informative Speaking Goals

1. What are some key differences between informative speaking and persuasive speaking? Is it possible for these two separate genres to overlap? Why or why not?
2. Part of being accurate is making sure that your information is current.
3. What are some ways to make sure that the information you have is current and accurate?

13.2: Informative Speaking Topics

1. Science fiction films would be an example of what type of Informative Speech topic?
2. If your topic is Neil DeGrasse Tyson (person), what are two possible main points for this speech?
3. Do you feel choosing an informative speech topic is more challenging than choosing a persuasive topic? Why or why not?

13.3: Creating Your Thesis

1. How do you avoid getting overwhelmed when there are “too many” potential topics to choose from?
2. What’s one example of a broad topic you could narrow down into a specific speech argument?
3. Do you feel that creating a "mind map" works for you, personally? Why or why not?

13.4: Choosing Your Main Points

1. How does grouping information into 2–3 main points help both the speaker and the audience during a speech?
2. How might the “value” of each main point—considering its importance and available material—affect the way a speech is organized and delivered?
3. Do you prefer grouping ideas into categories or outlining your ideas?

13.5: Finding Your Delivery Style

1. What would you say is your preferred speaking style? Extemporaneous, impromptu, or manuscript?
2. Have you ever presented a group speech? Do you think they are more challenging or less challenging than individual speeches?
3. Do you feel manuscript speaking is still effective in formal settings? Or should more conversational speaking styles become the norm for formal settings?

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14: PERSUASIVE SPEAKING

Overview

Every message functions as an act of advocacy. Choosing what matters, how to frame it, and who to reach gives communication its purpose. Persuasive communication does more than inform; it engages audiences' values and needs, encourages reflection, and motivates action. The most effective messages build relationships, acknowledge listeners' perspectives, and create lasting impact.

Audiences can be understood in multiple layers: those physically present, those represented or affected, and the speaker as a reflective participant. Recognizing these dimensions allows messages to be tailored thoughtfully, avoiding assumptions and stereotypes. Careful consideration of beliefs, values, and contextual factors strengthens credibility and enhances persuasiveness.

Ethical advocacy remains central to effective persuasion. Words carry influence, shaping understanding and potentially empowering or silencing communities. Responsible communicators prioritize truth, fairness, and respect while remaining attentive to cultural and social dynamics. Sensitivity to timing, context, and audience expectations increases both relevance and impact.

Managing anxiety and building confidence are also essential components of persuasive communication. Preparation, rehearsal, and audience awareness can transform apprehension into productive energy. By anticipating reactions and emphasizing shared concerns, messages can inspire action, persuade thoughtfully, and contribute to meaningful change.

Chapter Goals

- Define public speaking as a purposeful, context-driven form of advocacy and civic engagement.
- Apply ethical principles and reflexivity to communication, ensuring advocacy is responsible, inclusive, and culturally aware.
- Analyze and understand audiences (explicit, implied, and personal) by considering needs, demographics, beliefs, attitudes, and values to craft relevant and persuasive messages.
- Construct and organize persuasive propositions of fact, value, or policy using clear evidence, logical reasoning, and appropriate organizational patterns such as categorical organization, problem-solution, or Monroe's Motivated Sequence.
- Develop strategies to address public speaking challenges, including apprehension, audience resistance, cognitive biases, and logical fallacies, while maintaining credibility and ethical integrity.

To support your understanding of this chapter, we've emphasized important terms and concepts that appear throughout the content. These foundational ideas are bolded the first time they're introduced. You'll likely encounter them again in later sections and chapters, so it's worth taking a moment to review them closely. Each term is defined within its context and can serve as a helpful reference as you delve deeper into the topic.

Keywords

- Action
- All-Or-Nothing Thinking
- Attitudes
- Attention
- Advocate
- Beliefs
- Call-To-Action
- Categorical Organization
- Cause-Effect Reasoning
- Civic Participation

- Coherent Thought
- Communication Apprehension
- Comparison
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Context
- Contextual Preparation
- Culture
- Deductive Reasoning
- Demographics
- Ethos
- Ethics
- Exemplification and Elaboration
- Explicit Audience
- Fallacies
- Fortune Telling
- Implicated Audience
- Inductive Reasoning
- Listening
- Logos
- Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs
- Mental Preparation
- Monroe's Motivated Sequence
- Need
- Needs
- Oppositional Arguments
- Overgeneralization
- Pathos
- Persuasion
- Persuasive Continuum
- Physical Preparation
- Policy Propositions
- Problem-Solution Pattern
- Propositions Of Fact
- Propositions Of Value
- Public Controversy
- Public Speaking
- Reflexivity
- Rhetoric
- Rhetorical Analysis
- Rhetorical Balance
- Satisfaction
- Speech Preparation
- Stereotyping
- Symbols
- The Advertiser's Stance
- The Entertainer's Stance
- The Pedant's Stance
- Totalizing
- Values
- Visualization

14.1: Defining Persuasive Speaking

14.2: Centering Our Audience

14.3: Defining Rhetoric

14.4: Ethics, Power, Persuasion, and Advocacy

14.5: Chapter Wrap-Up
14.6: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 14
14.7: References
14.8: Teacher Resources
14.8.1: Exercises
14.8.2: Discussion Questions

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14.1: Defining Persuasive Speaking

Understanding Persuasion

On the first day of class, instructors often provide a “lay of the land,” introducing students to course documents, the syllabus, and reading materials. They may emphasize the importance of reading the textbook: the material deepens understanding, supports assignment completion, and cultivates critical thinking skills that extend beyond the classroom. This guidance is an example of persuasion: the instructor aims to convince students that reading is a beneficial action. As audience members, students weigh potential benefits against consequences. When persuasion is successful, the audience adopts the advocated behavior or perspective.

Persuasion is ubiquitous, influencing our beliefs, actions, and decisions in interpersonal, professional, and digital contexts. It can encourage, influence, or urge, but may also appear manipulative or coercive. Recognizing persuasive techniques allows individuals to ethically persuade and critically evaluate arguments.

Introducing Persuasive Speaking

Persuasion is “the process of creating, reinforcing, or changing people’s beliefs or actions” (Lucas, 2015). Everyday examples include convincing friends to see a movie, requesting an assignment extension, or applying for a job. In public speaking, persuasion addresses community problems or controversies, aiming to influence audience beliefs or actions. Public speaking is a form of civic engagement, facilitating democratic deliberation by discussing feasible choices for community issues.

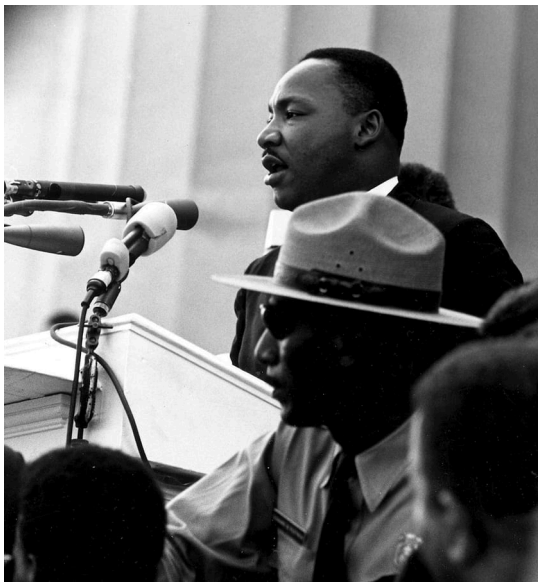


Figure 14.1.1: Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. He advocated for racial equality, economic justice, and civil rights. (Public Domain; Rowland Scherman via Wikimedia Commons)

A **public controversy** is a community dispute affecting many people, typically involving multiple perspectives. Social media illustrates daily engagement with controversies, where communities deliberate solutions to shared problems.

Identifying a controversy for a speech involves listening to community priorities and asking key questions: What is the problem? Who is affected? What are potential solutions? Context and power dynamics are critical: the physical context constrains the scope of a speech, while cultural context situates advocacy within broader discussions. Speakers must also consider who is empowered or disempowered by their perspective (Massey, 2004). Reflexivity, research, and consideration of alternatives help ensure advocacy is ethical and inclusive.

Formulating Persuasive Propositions

Once you feel confident about a controversial issue that is ethical, timely, and relevant, you'll need to decide which type of persuasive proposition to use in your speech: fact, value, or policy. Each requires a different approach and may produce different persuasive outcomes for your audience.

Propositions of Fact

Propositions of fact answer the question, "Is this true?" Speeches using them aim to establish the truth of a statement, supported by evidence rather than moral judgment or policy action. These differ from universally accepted facts (e.g., "water's symbol is H_2O"); instead, they address claims open to debate or supported by competing evidence.

Examples of Propositions of Fact

- Converting to solar energy can save homeowners money.
- Coal exacerbates global warming.
- Climate change has been caused by human activity.
- Granting tuition tax credits to private school parents perpetuates educational inequity.
- William Shakespeare did not write most of the plays attributed to him.
- John Doe committed the crime of which he is accused.

Notice that no values, good or bad, are explicitly mentioned. The point of these propositions is to prove with evidence the truth of a statement, not its inherent value. Since you may not call for direct action, your arguments should show why the information matters or how it clarifies a controversy. These propositions are especially persuasive when new evidence or scientific findings emerge, relying on facts, statistics, definitions, or expert testimony.

Propositions of Value

Propositions of value argue that something is good/bad or right/wrong. They often include words like good, bad, best, worst, just, unjust, ethical, or immoral.

Examples of Propositions of Value

- Hybrid cars are the best form of automobile transportation today.
- Homeschooling is more beneficial for children than traditional schooling.
- The War in Iraq was not justified.
- Capital punishment is morally wrong.
- Segregation and apartheid are wrong.
- Mascots using Native American names or symbols are demeaning.

Since values are culturally situated, speakers must define the standards they're using. What makes a war "justified," or a car "the best"? Different audiences may interpret those terms as safest, cheapest, most responsible, stylish, or prestigious.

Effective propositions of value rely on shared beliefs with the audience, so knowing their values is key to framing your argument.

Propositions of Policy

Policy propositions identify solutions to problems by calling for changes in government, community, school, or individual behavior. Speeches with these propositions aim to spur immediate or long-term action, or to shift audience perspectives.

Examples of Propositions of Policy

- Our state should require mandatory recertification of lawyers every ten years.
- The federal government should ensure clean water standards for all citizens.
- Georgia should require drivers over 75 to pass a vision test and present a doctor's certificate before license renewal.
- The Supreme Court should rule migrant detention centers unconstitutional.

These propositions are easy to spot because they almost always have the word "should" in them.

Policy propositions may call on organizations or agencies to act, or urge audiences to change their behaviors themselves. For example, with climate change, solutions could involve government, nonprofits, or individuals reducing its local effects. Research helps identify which actors are best suited to address the problem.

They also include a clear call-to-action. Beyond general appeals like "call your senator," specify what your audience should do and how it connects to your policy solution. A **call-to-action** tells the audience exactly what action to take to support a policy solution. It should be clear, specific, feasible, and show why the action matters, often using action-oriented verbs like sign, attend, or vote. Strong calls-to-action connect the audience directly to the solution and motivate immediate engagement.

Organizing Persuasive Propositions

While we've discussed several speech organizational patterns (9.2: The Body of a Speech), the following are the most commonly used for persuasive speaking. Once you've identified your main argument, consider which pattern best supports it. For propositions of fact or value, a **categorical organization** works well, presenting two to four distinct arguments that reinforce the claim. For propositions of policy, the **problem-solution pattern** is common, since audiences need to recognize a problem and understand the consequences of inaction before being motivated to act. More detailed or impactful persuasive speeches often use **Monroe's Motivated Sequence** (Monroe, 1951), which builds on John Dewey's reflective thinking process to guide listeners step by step toward action.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence

- **Attention:** Introduce topic and establish credibility.
- **Need:** Define the problem and demonstrate its significance.
- **Satisfaction:** Present and defend the solution.
- **Visualization:** Illustrate positive outcomes of action or negative outcomes of inaction.
- **Action:** Provide concrete steps for audience engagement.
  - The more concrete the action step, the better. For instance, if urging students to go out and vote in the upcoming election, provide hours and locations where they can vote.

Next, you will encounter several examples that illustrate different types of persuasive propositions. These examples will help you understand how propositions of fact and value often use a categorical organization, breaking arguments into clear, evidence-based points, while propositions of policy typically follow a problem-solution pattern or Monroe's Motivated Sequence to define the problem, propose solutions, and guide the audience toward action. Studying these examples will give you a practical sense of how each type of proposition is structured and organized.

Think About This 14.1.1 Categorizing Our Propositions

Fact and Value: Categorical Organization

Proposition of Fact Example:

Topic: Converting to solar energy can save homeowners money.

- Solar energy reduces power bills.
- Solar energy requires less maintenance.

- Solar energy works when the grid goes down.

Proposition of Value Example:

Topic: Social Media Use

- **Proposition:** Limiting daily social media use is the healthiest approach for teenagers' mental well-being.
- **Explanation:** This argues that restricting social media is *good* because it supports emotional health and reduces stress.

Policy: Problem-Solution Pattern

Proposition of Policy Example:

Topic: Increasing Campus Recycling

- **Problem:** Most students don't recycle, and trash ends up in landfills, harming the environment.
- **Solution:** Place clearly labeled recycling bins across campus, run awareness campaigns, and incentivize participation.

Proposition of Policy (Monroe's Motivated Sequence) Example:

Topic: Reducing Single-Use Plastics on Campus

- **Attention:** Overflowing trash bins and plastic litter are harming our campus and environment.
- **Need:** Most single-use plastics aren't recycled, pollute ecosystems, and cost the school money.
- **Satisfaction:** Replace single-use plastics with reusable bottles, utensils, and refill stations.
- **Visualization:** Imagine a clean campus with reduced waste versus a campus still buried in plastic.
- **Action:** Sign the petition, use reusable items, and encourage zero-waste practices at events.

Regardless of the organizational pattern, effective speeches require clear, well-defined claims supported by credible evidence, explanations that connect the evidence to the argument (warrants), and careful consideration of the audience's values, beliefs, and knowledge to ensure the message is persuasive and meaningful.

Audience Appeals

Persuasion requires an audience, and the central question is, "How can I persuade the audience to accept my proposition of fact, value, or policy?" Effective persuasion begins with identifying a target audience: individuals willing to listen despite disagreement, limited knowledge, or lack of experience with the topic. Since persuasion involves change, the audience consists of those who have not yet adopted the speaker's viewpoint.

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
Strongly Disagree			**Neutral**			**Strongly Agree**

Figure 14.1.2: The Persuasive Continuum. (CC BY 4.0; Stibbard via LibreTexts)

The **persuasive continuum**, as shown in Figure 13.1.2, provides a framework for visualizing audience positions relative to a proposition. Audience members may range from strong opposition (-3) to strong support (+3). For example, a proposition such as "The main cause of climate change is human activity" requires understanding where the audience falls on the continuum. Individuals may strongly agree and take action (+3), agree without action (+2), mildly agree (+1), remain neutral (0), mildly oppose (-1), strongly oppose (-2), or completely reject the concept (-3). Persuasion aims to move the audience closer to support (+3).

The audience's initial position guides strategy. Introducing a topic to a neutral audience (0) involves moving them toward mild or strong agreement (+1 to +3). Attempting to shift a strongly opposed audience (-3) directly to full support is unrealistic; initial efforts should focus on establishing awareness and credibility. Identifying audience values, attitudes, and beliefs is essential, and speakers should avoid assumptions or stereotypes. For instance, some audiences may value higher education, while others prioritize work experience; recognizing these differences informs the evidence and arguments used.

Rhetorical Appeals

Once audience positions and values are understood, speakers can select rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos) to motivate action. **Ethos** (personal appeal) relies on the speaker's credibility and character, achieved through authoritative sources, logical reasoning, audience awareness, and effective delivery. **Pathos** (emotional appeal) appeals to emotions such as love, anger, joy, or a sense of community to strengthen persuasion. **Logos** (logical appeal) involves organized, logical arguments supporting the claim.

Think About This 14.1.2 Applying Rhetorical Appeals

Ethos

"As a physician with over 20 years of experience treating patients with respiratory illnesses, I can confidently say that quitting smoking drastically reduces the risk of chronic lung disease. My colleagues and I have seen the benefits firsthand, and the medical research strongly supports this advice."

Why it's ethos: The speaker establishes authority and credibility through professional experience and reference to expert consensus.

Logos

"Imagine a child waking up every morning in a home without clean water, unable to brush their teeth or drink safely. Every donation we make brings hope, health, and a future to children who deserve a chance to thrive."

Why it's pathos: It evokes empathy, compassion, and a sense of moral duty, aiming to motivate action through emotion.

Pathos

"If we implement comprehensive recycling programs, we reduce the amount of waste that ends up in landfills. Less waste in landfills means less pollution in our air and water, which protects both the environment and public health. Therefore, investing in better recycling is a practical and necessary step for our community."

Why it's logos: The argument follows a clear cause-and-effect logic, appealing to reason without using numbers or statistics.

(**Note**: 13.3: Rhetoric will cover this topic in greater detail.)

In conclusion, understanding the audience's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations is central to persuasion. Effective speakers use this knowledge to select strategies and appeals that move the audience toward adopting their propositions.

Barriers to Persuasive Speaking

Persuasive speaking provides opportunities to advocate for important community solutions, but it is often difficult because audiences resist change. Research shows that humans are more concerned with losses than gains, making change stressful and undesirable (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Consequently, audiences protect their existing beliefs, attitudes, and values through selective exposure to messages they already agree with and selective recall of information supporting their viewpoints.

This principle underlies Leon Festinger's (1957) theory of **cognitive dissonance**, which posits that encountering information conflicting with existing beliefs creates psychological tension. Individuals are motivated to resolve this dissonance and maintain harmony, sometimes prioritizing personal beliefs over logical arguments. For example, a person may resist wearing a seatbelt despite credible evidence of its life-saving benefits, offering alternative explanations to justify their behavior. In persuasive speaking, the goal is to relieve dissonance by guiding the audience toward a new belief, attitude, or behavior.

Think About This 14.1.3 Cognitive Dissonance in Public Speaking

Cognitive dissonance occurs when people encounter information that conflicts with their existing beliefs, creating psychological tension. Individuals are motivated to resolve this tension, sometimes resisting logical arguments to maintain harmony.

Public Speaking Example: Imagine a speaker advocating for environmental conservation. The audience respects the speaker but continues habits that harm the environment, such as excessive use of single-use plastics. Cognitive dissonance arises because their behavior conflicts with the message.

Persuasive Tip: In persuasive speaking, the goal is to help the audience recognize this tension and guide them toward resolving it, whether by adopting new behaviors, shifting attitudes, or embracing new beliefs, while maintaining respect for their existing values.

Speakers can overcome these barriers by setting reasonable requests, emphasizing benefits and consequences, and addressing oppositional arguments. Reasonable requests involve incremental, achievable goals. The persuasive continuum demonstrates that attempting to move an audience from strong opposition to full support is unrealistic; small steps can cumulatively result in significant persuasion over time.



Figure 14.1.3: A speaker at a public rally against racism and hate speech addressing an audience. (CC BY 2.0; Fibonacci Blue via Wikimedia Commons)

Oftentimes with sensitive topics, like racism and hate speech in Figure 14.1.2 for example, persuasive speakers often face resistant audiences, but by setting reasonable requests, emphasizing benefits and consequences, and addressing opposing arguments, they can move listeners incrementally along the persuasive continuum toward meaningful change.

Benefits and consequences provide motivation. Audiences must perceive that the benefits of acting outweigh the stress of change. Speakers should identify advantages, improvements, or positive outcomes relevant to the audience, while also detailing the short- and long-term consequences of inaction. Organizing these arguments using Monroe's Motivated Sequence can clarify both benefits and risks.

Oppositional arguments reflect the mental dialogue audience members maintain while evaluating a proposition. Listeners may generate "yeah-buts," or reservations, that reinforce loss aversion and resistance to change. To address these effectively, speakers should present oppositional arguments in a personal and tentative way, using phrases like "Some of you may believe..." or "You may have heard..." This approach acknowledges differing perspectives, reduces defensiveness, and increases the likelihood of audience receptivity.

Example 14.1.1 Addressing Oppositional Arguments

Topic: Climate Change

Oppositional Argument: "Climate change isn't urgent because its worst effects won't happen for decades."

Response: "While some consequences of climate change will take years to fully manifest, recent research shows that rising temperatures, severe storms, and increased wildfires are already occurring worldwide (IPCC, 2023). Taking action now helps prevent further damage and protects communities immediately, not just in the distant future."

Effective speakers anticipate and refute these arguments, acknowledging misconceptions while providing credible evidence to support their position. Addressing opposing viewpoints enhances speaker credibility and demonstrates awareness of multiple perspectives, ultimately strengthening persuasion.

Avoiding Fallacies

Effective persuasive speaking requires ethical reasoning and sound evidence. A common pitfall in argumentation is the use of **fallacies**, which are erroneous conclusions or statements resulting from poor analysis (Walton, 2008). While dozens of fallacies exist, there are nine frequently encountered types.

Common Fallacies

- **False Cause** assumes a causal relationship without sufficient evidence. For example, claiming that high salaries of professional athletes caused the 2008 recession misattributes a minor factor to a complex problem.
- **Slippery Slope** suggests that one action inevitably leads to a chain of negative events, often ignoring other factors that could prevent the worst outcome. For instance, asserting that any gun control law will eventually result in criminals having all the guns exemplifies this fallacy.
- **Hasty Generalization** occurs when conclusions are drawn from an insufficient sample. Claiming that dropping out of college leads to financial success based on a single example is an oversimplification.
- **Straw Person** misrepresents an opponent's argument to make it easier to attack. For example, exaggerating a minor critique of a college to discredit it entirely exemplifies this fallacy.
- **False Dilemma** presents only two options when more exist, often portraying one option as undesirable to manipulate choice. Slogans such as "Love it or leave it" illustrate this reasoning.
- **Appeal to Tradition** argues that something should continue simply because it has always been done that way. Advocating coal mining solely because it is traditional exemplifies this fallacy.
- **Bandwagon** asserts that an idea is correct or desirable because it is popular. Popularity alone does not establish moral or logical validity.
- **Red Herring** introduces irrelevant information to distract from the main argument. For instance, shifting the discussion from immigration policy to national debt diverts attention from the original issue.
- **Ad Hominem** attacks a person's character rather than addressing the argument. For example, discrediting climate change because a politician supporting it has a personal legal issue is unrelated to the truth of the scientific claim.

Fallacies weaken reasoning and undermine arguments. To avoid them, critically evaluate evidence, ensure claims are supported, and articulate clear, logical connections between evidence and conclusion. Double-check that evidence is credible, sufficient, and properly explained to maintain persuasive integrity.

Key Takeaways

- Effective persuasive speaking requires understanding the audience's beliefs, values, and attitudes, anticipating resistance, and ethically guiding them toward your proposition. Clear claims, credible evidence, logical reasoning, and appropriate rhetorical appeals help move audiences along the persuasive continuum while maintaining integrity and fostering informed decision-making.
- Propositions of Fact assert the truth of a statement, without moral judgment, supported by evidence such as statistics or expert testimony. Examples include claims about climate change, solar energy, or historical events.

- Propositions of Value argue that something is good or bad, right or wrong, requiring evaluation against culturally situated moral or ethical standards. Examples include judgments about hybrid cars, capital punishment, or ethical practices. Effective value propositions align with audience beliefs.
- Propositions of Policy advocate solutions to problems, calling for action or policy change, often using the word "should." Examples include mandatory lawyer recertification, government action on clean water, or audience behavior modifications to address local concerns. Policy propositions usually embed specific calls-to-action, tailored to the audience's capacity to implement solutions.
- Organization enhances comprehension of persuasive arguments. Propositions of fact or value may use categorical organization, presenting discrete supporting arguments. Policy propositions often employ problem-solution structure or Monroe's Motivated Sequence.

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14.2: Centering Our Audience

Connecting with Our Audience

Public speaking, like stand-up comedy, depends on audience engagement. A well-crafted speech, like a strong comedy routine, can leave the audience attentive and connected, whereas a poorly developed speech may lead to confusion or disengagement. The success of communication depends not only on delivering content but also on fostering a relationship with the audience. “Calling in” the audience means crafting a message that resonates with and implicates them, inviting them to actively listen and engage.

This concept emphasizes that communication involves both content and relational dimensions (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Speakers must respect their audience, and the audience must trust the speaker for effective communication to occur.

Defining the Audience

Audiences can be understood in three dimensions. The first is the **explicit audience**, the individuals physically present to receive the message. These are the people sitting in chairs, actively listening to the speaker. Understanding this audience requires analyzing their composition, interests, and motivations to make the content relevant.



Figure 14.2.1: An engaged audience listens attentively during a TEDx event, highlighting the power of public speaking to inspire and connect communities. (CC BY 2.0; TEDxGateway via Wikimedia Commons)

The second dimension is the implied or **implicated audience**, which includes groups or individuals who may not be present but are represented or impacted by the speech. Advocates, organizations, or communities connected to the speech topic are considered part of this audience. For instance, a congressional hearing might have legislators as the explicit audience, while the communities affected by proposed legislation represent the implied audience. Ethical communication involves accurately representing these groups without reinforcing stereotypes or ethnocentric assumptions.



Figure 14.2.2: President Barack Obama delivers a national address from the Oval Office in 2010, responding to the BP oil spill disaster. (Public Domain; Pete Souza via Wikimedia Commons)

Figure 14.2.2 illustrates these concepts in practice. While Obama's explicit audience was the American public, the implied audience included Gulf Coast residents, environmental advocates, and future generations affected by environmental policies. His speech demonstrates how ethical communication requires acknowledging and representing these broader audiences thoughtfully, addressing their concerns without bias or exaggeration. By considering both explicit and implied audiences, speakers can craft messages that are relevant, persuasive, and socially responsible.

The third dimension emphasizes you as an audience member, highlighting the importance of attentive and reflective listening. Effective listening requires actively processing, understanding, and retaining information, rather than merely hearing it. Observing examples like Obama's address reinforces how careful consideration of the audience, both present and implied, enhances comprehension, engagement, and ethical communication practices.

Speaking to an Audience

Effective public speaking begins with understanding the explicit audience. Information gathering allows speakers to identify shared beliefs, values, and needs. **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** provides a framework for understanding motivation, ranging from basic physiological needs to self-actualization. Recognizing which needs are present or unmet in an audience helps speakers craft messages that are meaningful and relatable. For example, audiences may not always be conscious of certain needs, such as access to free educational resources. By highlighting these needs, a speaker can make content relevant and actionable.

By **needs**, we mean identifying important deficiencies that we are motivated to resolve. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Figure 14.2.3) is a framework to think about human needs. It is commonly discussed in the fields of management, psychology, and health professions. In trying to understand human motivation, Maslow theorized that, as our needs represented at the base of the pyramid are fulfilled, we move up the hierarchy to fulfill other types of needs (McLeod, 2014).

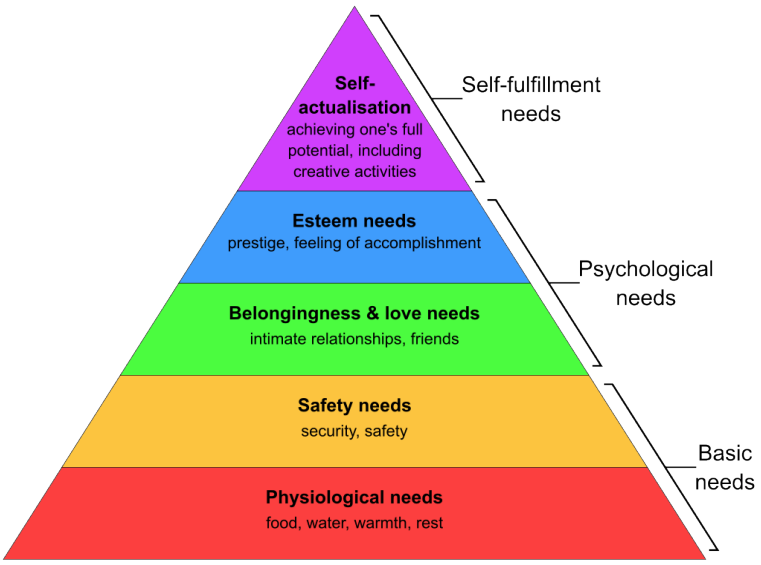


Figure 14.2.3: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs illustrates the progression of human motivation, from fulfilling basic physiological needs to achieving self-actualization. In public speaking, understanding this hierarchy allows speakers to tailor messages that resonate with audiences at various levels of need, fostering engagement and connection. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Androidmarsexpress via Wikimedia Commons)

According to Maslow's theory, our most basic physiological or survival needs must be met before we move to the second level, which is safety and security. When our needs for safety and security are met, we move up to relationship or connection needs, often called "love and belongingness." The fourth level up is esteem needs, which could be thought of as achievement, accomplishment, or self-confidence. The highest level, self-actualization, is achieved by those who are satisfied and secure enough in the lower four that they can make sacrifices for others. Self-actualized persons are usually thought of as altruistic or charitable.

Unfortunately, humans aren't always aware of what their needs are, so part of your task is learning about the audience and isolating needs that they may or may not be conscious of. For example, you're reading out of an open textbook: this book was free of charge. Until you were assigned the book, you may not have been aware that open textbooks (or open educational resources) were an option. It was a need that you weren't conscious of. A good speaker highlights the presence of a need by relating that issue to their audience.

When addressing an audience, determining what they need and where that need falls on the pyramid can influence how you make content that's relatable: it can help you call them in. Diving deeper into the speaking context, audience demographics, and audience values all provide necessary information to identify needs and craft relevant arguments.

In persuasive speaking, understanding your audience's needs is especially critical because it allows you to frame arguments in ways that resonate with their motivations and values. By identifying which needs are unmet or most salient, whether physiological, social, or esteem-related, speakers can emphasize how their message addresses these needs, increasing relevance and impact. Tailoring content in this way not only captures attention but also strengthens persuasion by connecting ideas to what the audience truly cares about.

Knowing the audience also strengthens ethos, or credibility. Demonstrating awareness of the audience's needs signals respect and builds trust, enhancing the persuasive impact of a speech. To gather audience information, speakers can analyze the context of the speaking event. This includes understanding why the audience has gathered, what brings them together, and what motivates their attendance. Contextual analysis can uncover common interests, professional affiliations, or local concerns that shape the audience's expectations and priorities.

Understanding Audience Demographics, Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes

A second strategy for gathering information about audiences involves demographics. **Demographics**, or sociocultural characteristics used to identify and classify populations, are a common means of organizing and analyzing groups. Surveys often collect demographic information to determine how responses differ across subgroups. In the United States, for instance,

researchers may examine average age, socioeconomic status, or educational background of incoming college students.

Demographics can provide useful insights into beliefs, attitudes, and responses to messages. Common categories include education, family status, gender identity, occupation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Additional categories may include ethnicity, gender expression, spirituality, ability or disability, nationality, region, and generational cohort. Importantly, demographics are dynamic and contextual. For example, religion encompasses diverse formal and informal practices, so identifying an audience as “religious” should not lead to assumptions about specific affiliations.



Figure 14.2.4: A diverse group of individuals in New York City, reflecting the city's rich demographic composition, which includes various age groups, socioeconomic statuses, educational backgrounds, and cultural identities. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Kevin He via Wikimedia Commons)

Understanding these demographics (Figure 14.2.4) is crucial for tailoring messages in public speaking and advocacy, ensuring they resonate with the audience's values, beliefs, and needs.

While informative, demographic data can also lead to stereotyping or totalizing. **Stereotyping** involves assuming that all members of a group share characteristics based on the behavior of a few. For example, observing two students driving recklessly and generalizing that all students are poor drivers exemplifies stereotyping. Such assumptions are reinforced when future observations confirm the stereotype and contradictory evidence is ignored. **Totalizing** occurs when one characteristic is treated as the entirety of an individual’s identity, such as reducing a person to their disability. Both practices are harmful and limit effective communication.

Instead, speakers should adopt reflexive thinking to recognize and challenge stereotypes and to remember that individuals belong to multiple demographic categories. Demographic data should be treated as one element of a larger audience matrix, complemented by deeper insights into beliefs, attitudes, and values.

Beliefs are statements held to be true, regardless of their objective accuracy (Bem, 1970). They often resist change due to stability, centrality, salience, and strength. For example, a belief in gender equality may strongly influence behavior and advocacy. **Values** represent goals or ideals considered desirable, such as monetary success, prestige, or nostalgia. These are often rooted in underlying beliefs. **Attitudes** reflect positive or negative evaluations of people, ideas, or objects. For example, an audience that values capitalism may respond negatively to mentions of socialism, while a campus community with a well-liked leader may respond positively when that leader is cited in a speech.

Beliefs, attitudes, and values are interrelated, and together with demographics, they provide important insight into an audience’s identity, needs, and priorities. Understanding these dimensions enables speakers to craft relevant, ethical, and persuasive messages.

Speaking for an Audience

Understanding audiences extends beyond those physically present. While analyzing the explicit audience, the formal group

directly addressed, is critical, speakers must also account for the implied or implicated audience. These are the groups, communities, or individuals who are either represented in discourse or impacted by its outcomes, even if they are not present.

For example, in a state congressional hearing debating reduced environmental protections, legislators constitute the explicit audience. However, implied audiences include local residents affected by pollution, businesses influenced by regulatory change, and communities whose health and environment may be at stake. Although these groups are not in the room, they are implicated in the decision and thus in the rhetoric surrounding it. To identify such audiences, speakers should ask: Who is being represented, discussed, or impacted by the advocacy?



Figure 14.2.5: Alabama State Senator Linda Coleman-Madison speaks at a hearing for SB314. Alabama Senate Bill 314 (SB314) was proposed legislation in 2023 aimed at encouraging the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfield sites, or previously contaminated properties. (CC BY 2.0; Jay Williams via Wikimedia Commons)

In Figure 14.2.5, while the legislators are the explicit audience, the implied audiences include local residents affected by pollution, businesses influenced by regulatory changes, and communities whose health and environment may be at stake. These groups are implicated in the decision-making process, highlighting the importance of considering both present and affected audiences in advocacy efforts.

Considering implied audiences may seem secondary, but communication is constitutive: speech participates in "world-making" by shaping how groups and cultures are represented. Thus, ethical communication requires attention to the power dynamics embedded in language. For instance, describing another nation as "barbaric" when advocating for military intervention positions that culture as inferior and justifies ethnocentric action. Such representations perpetuate stereotypes and are ethically problematic because they rely on cultural superiority rather than sound reasoning.

Implied audiences also include sources of ideas or cultural expressions incorporated into a speech. Using another group's narratives or an individual's intellectual work without acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism. Just as credit is expected in casual exchanges, such as acknowledging the originator of a joke, public advocacy demands proper attribution.

Recognizing implied audiences requires critical reflection, but it fosters more ethical and inclusive communication. By attending to both explicit and implied audiences, speakers can avoid harmful stereotypes, ensure fair representation, and strengthen the integrity of their advocacy.

Listening as an Audience Member

Listening is a crucial but challenging component of audience participation. Unlike hearing, which is purely physiological, **listening** requires focused attention, comprehension, and retention. One-time exposure to a speech necessitates active engagement since listeners cannot re-read spoken content. Listening can be categorized as empathetic (understanding feelings and motivations), appreciative (engaging with art or performance), or critical (evaluating the validity of arguments).



Figure 14.2.6: Audience listening to Alan Woods speak at the University of Toronto. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Fightback/ La Riposte via Wikimedia Commons)

Effective speakers can facilitate listening through planned redundancy, use of examples, presentation aids, audience interaction, and attention-getting techniques.

Barriers to listening include noise (physical and mental distractions), confirmation bias (interpreting information to confirm pre-existing beliefs), and information processing gaps (cognitive speed exceeding speaker delivery) (Nickerson, 1998; Foulke, 1968).

Personal barriers, such as fatigue, distraction, or lack of preparation, also reduce listening effectiveness. Intentional listening involves practicing the skill, engaging in reflexive listening, and preparing physically and mentally by taking notes and minimizing distractions. Research suggests that note-taking with pen and paper enhances retention compared to digital methods (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014).

Try This 14.2.1 Becoming a Better Listener

As audience members, barriers prohibit our ability to absorb information that could benefit us. Your own barrier might be not coming prepared, being quick to prejudge, or allowing gadgets to distract you. Recognizing the cause of your poor listening is the first step to becoming a better listener. Here are some steps, in summary:

- **Practice the skill**. Believe that good listening and improving your own listening are important. You would not want to be called upon in a meeting at work when you were daydreaming or being distracted by a cell phone. Consider listening to speeches in a prepared manner and practice listening as a skill.
- **Practice reflexive listening**. Since it is so easy to react to a speaker's ideas with confirmation bias, go into listening knowing that you might disagree and that the automatic "turn off" tendency is a possibility. In other words, tell yourself to keep an open mind.
- **Be prepared to listen**. This means putting away mobile devices, having a pen and paper, and situating yourself physically to listen (not slouching or slumping). Have a purpose in listening. There is actual research to indicate that we listen better and learn/retain more when we take notes with a pen and paper than when we type them on a computer or tablet (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014). Situate yourself by making decisions that will aid in your listening.
- **When taking notes, keep yourself mentally engaged by writing questions that arise**. This behavior will fill in the gaps, create an interactive experience with the speaker, and reduce the likelihood that your mind will wander. However, taking notes does not mean "transcribing" the speech or lecture. Whether in class or in a different listening situation, do not (try to) write everything the speaker says down. Instead, start with looking for the overall purpose and structure, then for pertinent examples of each main point. Repetition by a speaker usually indicates you should write something down.

Key Takeaways

- Public speaking, like stand-up comedy, relies on actively engaging the audience. Successful communication involves both content and relational dimensions, calling the audience in to listen and participate.
- Effective speakers consider the explicit audience (physically present), the implied/implicated audience (represented or affected groups), and themselves as reflective listeners. Awareness of all three strengthens communication.
- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a framework to identify audience motivations. Recognizing both conscious and unconscious needs allows speakers to craft messages that are relevant, meaningful, and actionable.
- Analyzing demographics, beliefs, values, and attitudes helps speakers avoid stereotyping and totalizing, ensuring fair, ethical, and inclusive advocacy that respects all audiences.
- Effective listening requires focus, comprehension, retention, and reflexivity. Barriers include distraction, fatigue, and confirmation bias, but practicing note-taking, preparation, and mindfulness enhances audience engagement and understanding.

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14.3: Defining Rhetoric

The Art of Rhetoric

Have you ever changed your opinion after a debate, defended a weak position more fiercely as a conversation went on, or been persuaded by a poor idea only to regret it later? If so, the art of rhetoric can help explain why.

Broadly defined, rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Since communication often aims to influence beliefs or behaviors, rhetorical principles are found in speeches, writing, images, films, gestures, and other forms of expression. Studying rhetoric develops two key skills: recognizing how we are persuaded and applying those tools to persuade others.

First, **rhetorical analysis** sharpens awareness of how we come to believe ideas. Humans accept messages not only because of evidence but also because of trust in the source and how messages align with preexisting beliefs. Rhetorical study helps us separate reasonable claims from unreliable ones. Second, rhetoric improves our ability to communicate persuasively. Since persuasion is central to daily life, whether applying for jobs, negotiating tasks, or convincing friends, these skills are essential both personally and professionally.

Although rhetorical traditions exist globally, this textbook focuses on the European tradition, first documented in Athens in the fifth century BCE and developed for more than two millennia.

Defining Rhetoric

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) defined **rhetoric** as "an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (Kennedy, 1991, p. 36).

His definition matters for two reasons:

1. First, persuasion is learnable. Aristotle described rhetoric as a technē ("TEKH-nay"), an art or skill with rules that can be studied (Kennedy, 1991, p. 29). Some individuals are persuasive by nature, but without study audiences may be misled by charisma rather than reason.
2. Second, Aristotle identified the three modes of appeal, ethos, pathos, and logos, which remain fundamental tools for analyzing and crafting persuasive messages.

The Three Modes of Appeal

Twentieth-century scholars, through the Neo-Aristotelian school of rhetoric, revived Aristotle's theories, emphasizing the three modes of appeal. These provide a framework for evaluating persuasive messages and designing effective communication.

Logos: Appeal to Logic

Logos appeals to reason through evidence, organization, and structure. Speakers use fact-checked information, clear explanations, and non-biased reasoning.

One common technique is **comparison**, which involves drawing fair analogies between similar cases to help the audience understand or evaluate a point. **Cause-effect reasoning** links actions to outcomes, showing the consequences of specific behaviors or decisions.

Deductive reasoning begins with a general principle and applies it to a particular case, helping speakers connect broad ideas to specific situations. In contrast, **inductive reasoning** moves from specific examples to a general conclusion, allowing audiences to see patterns or trends across multiple observations.

Exemplification and elaboration support claims with concrete examples and explain their significance, making abstract ideas

more understandable and persuasive.

Finally, **coherent thought** ensures the argument is well-organized, avoiding repetition or tangents, so the audience can follow the reasoning clearly from start to finish.

Example 14.3.1 Using Logos in Public Speaking

Example 1: Informative Speech

Topic: Renewable Energy Trends

Scenario: A speaker gives a university lecture explaining the rise of solar and wind energy worldwide. They present verified statistics, graphs comparing energy output across regions, and clear explanations of technological processes, using cause/effect reasoning to show how policy changes have led to increased adoption.

Impact on Audience: Students gain a clear understanding of renewable energy trends, grasp the relationship between policy and outcomes, and can accurately summarize key points in discussions or exams. The logical structure makes the information memorable and credible.

Example 2: Persuasive Speech

Topic: Reducing Single-Use Plastic

Scenario: A community activist presents a persuasive talk urging local residents to reduce single-use plastics. They cite studies showing the impact of plastic on marine life, provide comparisons with communities that have successfully reduced waste, and explain how individual actions contribute to measurable environmental improvements. The speaker avoids bias and structures the argument in a step-by-step, rational progression.

Impact on Audience: Audience members are convinced that their actions matter, increasing the likelihood they will adopt reusable alternatives and support local plastic-reduction policies. The logical appeal encourages reasoned decision-making rather than emotional reaction alone.

Pathos: Appeal to Emotions

Pathos engages the audience's emotions to make arguments more compelling. Speakers evoke feelings such as empathy, pride, fear, or hope to motivate action or agreement. Techniques include storytelling, vivid imagery, personal anecdotes, and emotionally charged language. While effective, overreliance on emotion can signal weak reasoning or manipulation.

Example 14.3.2 Using Pathos in Public Speaking

Example 1: Informative Speech

Topic: Effects of Homelessness

Scenario: A social work lecturer presents a lecture on homelessness, sharing the lived experiences of individuals and families, including stories and images illustrating daily struggles.

Impact on Audience: Students gain a deep emotional understanding of the challenges faced by the homeless, which enhances engagement and retention of factual information. Emotional connection encourages thoughtful discussion and empathy.

Example 2: Persuasive Speech

Topic: Supporting Local Animal Shelters

Scenario: A speaker urges community members to volunteer at or donate to local animal shelters. They share personal stories of rescued animals, include vivid photos, and describe the emotional bond between humans and pets.

Impact on Audience: Audience members feel empathy and moral responsibility, increasing the likelihood of donations or volunteer participation. Emotional engagement drives action in support of the cause.

Ethos: Appeal to Values and Trust

Ethos has two facets: audience values and the rhetor's credibility/character. On one level, rhetoricians appeal to values such as justice, equality, tradition, or patriotism, aligning their arguments with what the audience believes is "right." On another level, ethos concerns the rhetor's credibility (knowledge and expertise) and character (virtue, goodwill, and integrity). For instance, a physics professor holds more credibility on relativity than a casual learner, while politicians often shape their character to gain voter trust. Aristotle noted that audiences trust good judgment, goodwill, and good character (Kennedy, 1991).

Effective ethos involves referencing shared values, using language or a style familiar to the audience, demonstrating expertise, and establishing character while showing concern for the audience.

Example 14.3.3 Using Ethos in Public Speaking

Example 1: Informative Speech

Topic: Advances in Medical Research

Scenario: A medical researcher presents findings on a new treatment. They explain methodology in detail, cite peer-reviewed studies, and clarify limitations of the research.

Impact on Audience: Listeners trust the information and understand complex findings accurately. The speaker's credibility ensures students and professionals can rely on the conclusions for learning or decision-making.

Example 2: Persuasive Speech

Topic: Promoting Renewable Energy Policy

Scenario: A policy advocate presents to local government officials, emphasizing years of experience in energy policy, successful implementation of projects, and commitment to community welfare.

Impact on Audience: Officials perceive the speaker as knowledgeable and trustworthy, increasing the likelihood that they will support proposed renewable energy initiatives. Ethos strengthens persuasive effectiveness by building audience confidence.

Successful persuasion occurs when a speaker or writer carefully balances all three rhetorical appeals (logos, pathos, and ethos) rather than relying on any single approach in isolation. While logical reasoning (logos) provides evidence and structure, emotional engagement (pathos) connects the audience to the message on a personal level, and credibility and character (ethos) ensure the speaker is trusted and respected.

Overemphasizing one appeal while neglecting the others can weaken the overall argument: a purely logical presentation may fail to motivate action, an overly emotional appeal may seem manipulative, and an argument based solely on credibility may lack substance. By integrating all three appeals thoughtfully, communicators create persuasive messages that are compelling, credible, and memorable, increasing the likelihood that audiences will understand, internalize, and act upon the message.

Understanding Rhetorical Situations

Persuasion occurs within specific contexts, or rhetorical situations. Bitzer (2009) defined a rhetorical situation as a combination of three elements: exigence, audience, and constraints. More broadly, he described it as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse...can so

constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" (pp. 19–20). Put simply, rhetoric is purposeful communication aimed at changing reality by persuading audiences to think or act differently.

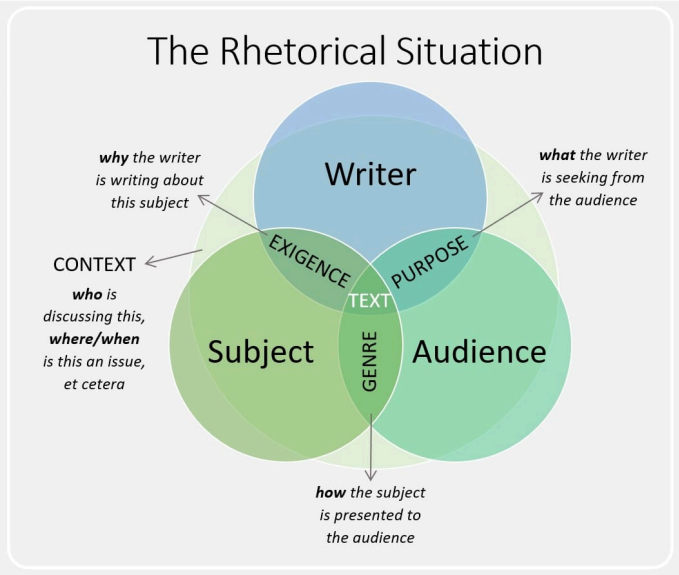


Figure 14.3.1: The illustration "The Rhetorical Situation" shows the interdependent relationship between the speaker, audience, and message in persuasive communication. This model, derived from Lloyd Bitzer's theory, emphasizes the dynamic interplay that shapes effective rhetoric. Alternative description of image. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Justin Jory via Wikimedia Commons)

Exigence

An exigence is the problem or issue a rhetor seeks to address. It need not always be negative; it may simply be something that "needs to be said or done." However, not every exigence is rhetorical. For an exigence to be rhetorical, it must be open to modification through human communication. Natural disasters, for example, are non-rhetorical, though related human responses (e.g., storm preparation) can be rhetorical. Climate change illustrates the debate: while some deny human influence, most researchers identify specific human behaviors, such as reliance on fossil fuels, as rhetorical exigences because people can be persuaded to change them.

Audience

A rhetorical audience differs from a general audience. According to Bitzer (2009), it must (1) have the capacity to act on the exigence and (2) be persuadable. Simply listening is insufficient; the audience must both be able and willing to engage. For example, students at a research presentation may learn but not act, making them a non-rhetorical audience.

Constraints

Constraints are factors that limit persuasion, including beliefs, attitudes, traditions, documents, interests, or even the medium of communication. Both rhetoricians and audiences bring constraints that shape a message's effectiveness. For instance, in persuading voters to approve a waste-to-energy plant, rhetoricians must address concerns about environmental safety. Constraints cannot be ignored; they must inform message design.

The Rhetorical Stance

Building on Aristotle, Booth (1963) introduced the concept of **rhetorical balance**: maintaining equilibrium among arguments (logos), audience needs (pathos), and speaker character (ethos). Persuasive messages should respect all three, though one may be emphasized depending on context.

Avoiding Rhetorical Imbalance

Booth warned against rhetorical imbalance, which he described as three corruptions:

- **The Pedant's Stance**: overemphasis on subject matter while neglecting audience needs, common in lectures that fail to adapt to listeners.
- **The Advertiser's Stance:** overvaluing effect while undervaluing substance, such as companies engaging in "greenwashing."
- **The Entertainer's Stance:** sacrificing substance for personality or charm, prioritizing ego over persuasion.

Effective communication requires avoiding these extremes and striving for rhetorical balance, consistently aligning content, audience engagement, and credibility so that the message is not only informative or entertaining but also persuasive, trustworthy, and tailored to the audience's expectations and needs.

Key Takeaways

- Rhetoric is purposeful communication aimed at persuading audiences and creating meaningful change.
- Persuasion can be learned through study and practice, as Aristotle emphasized.
- The three modes of appeal (logos, pathos, and ethos) are central to effective persuasion and should be thoughtfully integrated.
- Rhetorical situations require consideration of exigence, audience, and constraints: a rhetorical exigence is a problem that can be addressed through communication, a rhetorical audience can act and be persuaded, and constraints shape how messages are received and designed.
- Effective communication depends on maintaining rhetorical balance, carefully integrating logos, pathos, and ethos while avoiding overreliance on logic, emotion, or style alone.

Attributions

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14.4: Ethics, Power, Persuasion, and Advocacy

The Power of a Public Speaker

Imagine your favorite public speaker. Who comes to mind for you? Perhaps a comedian like Mike Birbiglia, an activist like Malala Yousafzai, or a political figure such as Barack Obama. What made them memorable? Humor, relatability, passion, dynamism, confidence? Often it is not only what they say, but how they say it: their delivery, presence, and ability to inspire reflection or action.

This chapter introduces public speaking as a communication process with significant impact. Specifically, we frame public speaking as a form of advocacy. Selecting and sharing information is an act of advocating for its importance. Before exploring advocacy further, let us define public speaking.

What is Public Speaking?

Public speaking occurs when a speaker attempts to influence an audience with a purposeful message within a particular context. The speaker can inform, persuade, or entertain. The speaker typically holds the audience's attention for a set time, may facilitate limited interaction (e.g., questions), and bears responsibility for directing that exchange. Effective public speaking requires sound reasoning, clear organization, and intentional delivery. Traditionally face-to-face, public speaking also occurs digitally.

Key Components of Public Speaking

- A well-organized, well-supported message from a designated speaker;
- An audience;
- A context;
- Preparation;
- A purpose, ranging from informing to persuading to entertaining.

Speakers often believe their audience benefits from their message. Yet public speaking requires more than information; it demands engaging delivery, research, argument construction, and rehearsal to create a meaningful experience.

For example, Brené Brown's TED Talk, The Power of Vulnerability (2014), blends research, storytelling, and humor to create an impactful advocacy for embracing vulnerability. Conversely, less effective speakers fail to demonstrate why their ideas matter to an audience or community, leaving their message unmemorable.

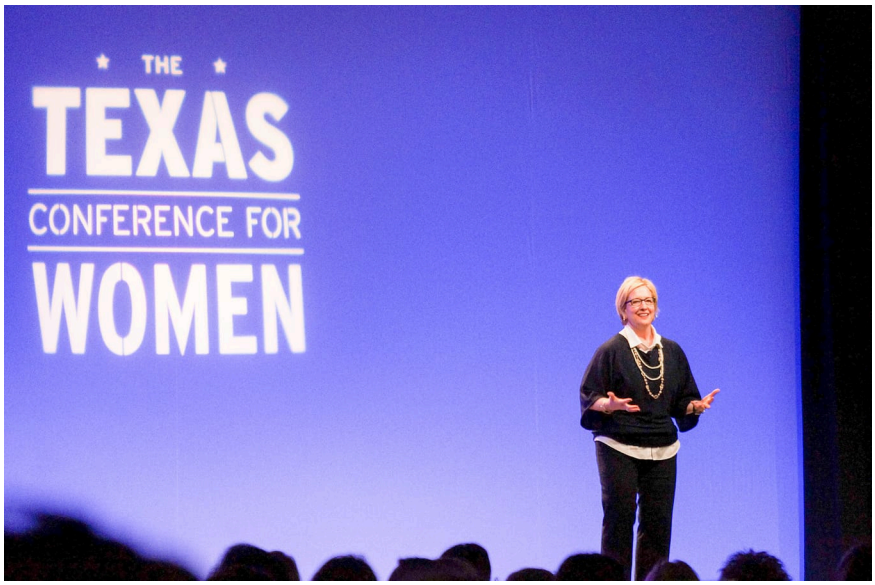


Figure 14.4.1: Dr. Brené Brown speaking at the Texas Conference for Women in Austin on October 24, 2012, delivering a powerful advocacy on embracing vulnerability. (CC BY 2.0; Dell Inc. via Wikimedia Commons)

Ultimately, what you advocate for and how you deliver it shapes the audience's experience. Tracing public speaking back to its roots will underscore the historical relevance of public speaking as a form of advocacy.

Advocacy as Public Speaking

Public speaking, historically termed rhetoric, has long been valued in Western traditions for fostering community, enabling self-governance, sharing ideas, and shaping policies. Ancient Athenian Greeks believed all citizens should learn rhetoric to participate in civic life. Rhetoric was central to civic discussion and advocacy.

Today, public speaking remains a key form of civic engagement. **Civic participation** involves listening to relevant information, engaging through public channels, such as voting, petitioning, or speaking, and advocating for issues that affect communities.

Core Elements of Advocacy

- Promotion of an idea, cause, concept, or information;
- Action directed toward a specific goal;
- Efforts to identify and solve current problems.

To **advocate** is to declare, "this idea matters," and invite others to reflect, reconsider, or act. Choosing to present a perspective means endorsing that perspective among countless possible arguments. In essence, every act of public speaking is an act of advocacy.

You may already practice advocacy in daily life: sharing articles online, supporting a family member in debate, or urging friends to change their behavior. Public speaking simply broadens that advocacy to larger audiences, sometimes representing groups or organizations beyond yourself.

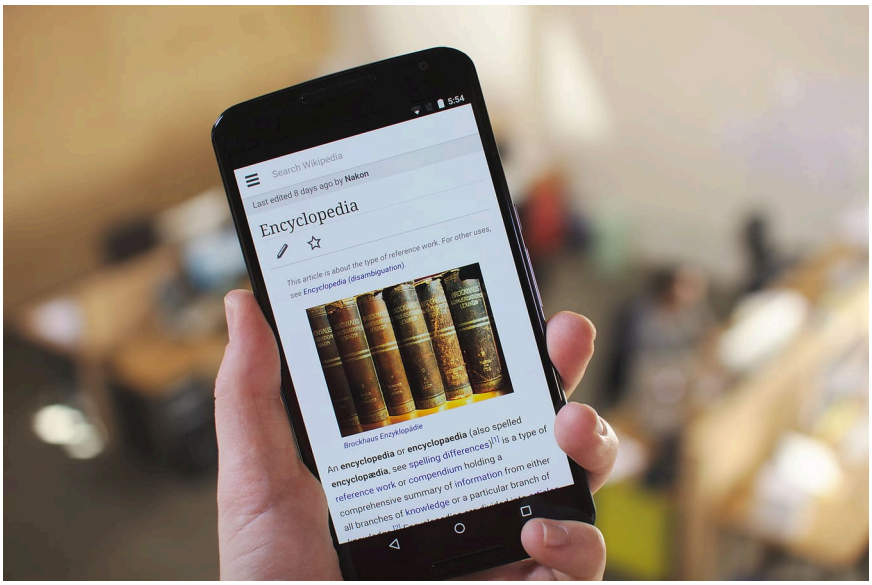


Figure 14.4.2: A person shares information digitally on a smartphone, reflecting how everyday advocacy can extend to broader audiences through online platforms. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Sage Ross via Wikimedia Commons)

Advocacy requires balancing personal interests with community goals. While our own perspectives often motivate us, advocacy can directly or indirectly affect others. Ethical advocacy considers these wider implications.

Thus, public speaking as advocacy has both personal and social functions. Throughout this book, we frame public speaking as advocacy and emphasize that with advocacy comes responsibility: ethical communication.

Communicating Ethically

Ethics refers to the practice of determining what is right, virtuous, or good (Tompkins, 2011). You could likely list a few key ethics that you personally hold. For example, you may view violence as unethical. Ethics are also understood and defined in our own communities. Colleges view plagiarism, or representing someone else's work as our own, as unethical and wrong within the academic community. As public speakers, ethics are central because you are attempting to influence others.

Think About This 14.4.1 Guiding Ethical Communication

When preparing a speech, two questions guide ethical communication:

- **Am I advocating ethically for ideas and others?**
  - Present accurate, truthful information and credit sources.
  - Avoid defamatory speech: false statements intended to damage character.
  - Reject hate speech targeting nationality, race, gender, ability, sexuality, religion, or citizenship.
  - Avoid demagoguery, or manipulating audiences through prejudice and emotion.
- **Am I representing myself ethically?**
  - Establish ethos by demonstrating honesty, integrity, and preparation.
  - Avoid misrepresenting expertise or authority.

Unethical advocacy disregards truth and erodes trust. Ethical speakers, by contrast, communicate transparently and responsibly. In addition to ethics, three principles deepen our understanding of public speaking: communication is constitutive, contextual, and cultural.

Communication as Constitutive

Communication is constitutive, meaning it creates meaning and reality (Nicotera, 2009). Words and actions do not merely transmit information; they shape perceptions and social worlds. For example, nonverbal disapproval, like a parent shaking their

head "no" in disappointment at their child, influences behavior and establishes shared meaning.

We negotiate this meaning through **symbols**, which can be a word, icon, gesture, picture, object, etc. These symbols stand in for and represent a thing or experience. “Dog” is a symbol that represents adorable pets. When you see the symbol “dog,” you might picture your own dog, so that symbol has an additional layer of meaning for you. “Dog” also often represents pets as friends (or "man's best friend”), so symbols can refer to literal objects, or to larger ideals and norms. This is what makes communication both fascinating and complex.

Since public speaking constitutes meaning, speakers bear responsibility for shaping audiences’ understanding of issues, identities, and communities. Communication is never neutral, it reflects power. When speakers highlight certain perspectives, they empower some voices while potentially silencing others.



Figure 14.4.3: Indigenous advocate Maulian Dana addresses the Skowhegan school board in Maine, advocating for the removal of the “Indians” mascot as part of a broader effort to challenge harmful cultural representations. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Amelia Tuplin via Wikimedia Commons)

For example, Indigenous communities in Maine successfully advocated for banning Indigenous mascots in public schools, arguing that such symbols perpetuated harmful stereotypes (Hauser, 2019). This case illustrates how communication can either empower or disempower communities. Communication is never neutral because meaning is always being negotiated.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that not all cultures share the same assumptions or interpretations, so speakers must be attentive to cultural differences when shaping messages. Being mindful of these differences helps ensure that communication is inclusive, respectful, and effective, reducing the risk of misinterpretation or unintended offense.

Think About This 14.4.2 The Power of Persuasion

While we’ve acknowledged that every act of public speaking is an act of advocacy, the critical importance of ethical communication cannot be understated when it comes to persuasive speaking. Persuasive speaking is all about attempting to alter, influence, or change someone’s attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviors.

As previously mentioned, this goal to influence an audience (rather than solely inform them) has the particular capacity to either empower or disempower various groups and individuals. When speaking persuasively, we must hold ethics in the forefront of our minds.

Communication as Contextual

Communication occurs in particular times and places that shape meaning. **Context** includes literal settings (e.g., a classroom, coffee shop, or digital platform) and broader historical or social conversations.

For public speaking, context determines audience, purpose, channel, and delivery. Being aware of larger contexts, such as debates about climate change or community issues, helps speakers situate their advocacy within relevant conversations. Thus, effective advocacy requires attention to both immediate and broader contexts.

Example 14.4.1 Breaking Up

Pretend, for example, that you want to break-up with your partner. Here is how the context pertaining to the break-up could change the communication encounter:

Scenario 1

- **Time:** Afternoon
- **Place:** Coffee Shop
- **Impact:** You may decide, that due to your nerves and unease about handling this uncomfortable situation, to talk in a public space. There's additional noise, people, and you may feel you have an easier ability to leave alone or be left alone. In the end, the break-up is quick, curt, and maybe even rather formal.

Scenario 2

- **Time:** Evening
- **Place:** Private Apartment
- **Impact:** Perhaps anticipating an emotional blowout that requires privacy, you may decide that a private apartment is more fitting because a coffee shop may lend itself to external noise and events, changing the vibe, and disrupting your serious talk. In the end, the break-up is long, emotional, and informal.

As this example demonstrates, context refers to a specific time and place: the literal context.

For public speaking, the time and place are key considerations because that context will inform what you say, why, and for how long.

Questions to Ask Yourself Prior to Speaking Publicly

- Where will I be speaking? To whom?
- What is the purpose?
- When is it taking place?
- Am I delivering the message through a live or mediated channel?

As a communicator and public speaker, being attuned and informed about the larger context is paramount, because it will direct you toward an advocacy. What's relevant? What's important to consider now? What references or examples are timely?

Communication as Cultural

All communication is cultural. **Culture** consists of shared language, values, beliefs, rituals, and practices ("Culture and Communication," 2002). Since communication relies on cultural symbols, it both creates and reflects cultural norms.

Speakers must recognize that communication reflects cultural assumptions and advocate reflexively. Speakers need to critically consider how their words represent and affect others. Intentions matter less than impact, as communication actively shapes cultural realities.



Figure 14.4.4: Young Americans hold up the United States flag before the start of the U.S.-Sweden soccer match at the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup in Wolfsburg, Germany. (Public Domain; U.S. Department of State via Wikimedia Commons)

The United States has certain cultural characteristics: the 4th of July or valuing free speech, for example. You don't, however, just belong to one, or even two, cultures. We are all influenced by multiple cultural norms and values.

Think About This 14.4.3 How Communication is Cultural

Communication is cultural because cultures rely on symbols (the bedrock of communication) to determine the norms, expectations, and values within the group. This means two things:

- First, culture is created through the communication process. In other words, we use communication to negotiate (and create) our cultural values;
- Second, communication reflects the cultural values and norms of the people communicating. We can often glean what cultural values are present by looking at someone's communication.

When we communicate, we are relying on the cultural norms that we've been taught and, by using those symbols, advocating for those ideals.

When you are advocating for an idea and communicating why that idea matters, it's important not to assume that your cultural perspective or location is the best or only perspective. Instead, you must be reflexive about what norms you are advocating for and how you may be representing topics or ideas from or about other cultures. **Reflexivity** means to critically consider how our values, assumptions, actions, and communication affect others. From a communication perspective, reflexivity acknowledges that your intentions are secondary to the impact that your verbal and nonverbal behavior has on others and on the cultural realities that you create.

For example, debates over Indigenous mascots highlight cultural differences in how free speech and cultural representation are valued. Reflexivity requires asking: Does my advocacy ethically represent cultures, or does it perpetuate stereotypes and disempowerment? Communication thus serves as the foundation of cultural meaning, both personal and collective.

Communication Apprehension

Many speakers experience **communication apprehension**, or fear of giving a public speech, before or during a presentation. (Communication apprehension is referenced in greater detail in 11.1: What is Communication Apprehension?, 11.2: Why do we get Communication Apprehension?, and 11.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension.) Thinking about advocacy or advocating for ideas can sound intimidating. Even experienced professors can feel anxiety before teaching. To advocate or present information to an audience, with some more willing to listen actively than others, is a big responsibility. Understandably, this can lead speakers

to experience apprehension while preparing and delivering a presentation.

Common Forms of Apprehension

Apprehension often stems from fear of failure, rejection, or misperceptions such as:

- **All-or-nothing thinking:** Believing imperfection equals failure;
- **Overgeneralization:** Assuming one poor performance predicts future failure;
- **Fortune telling:** Expecting inevitable negative outcomes (“Public Speaking Anxiety,” 2015).

One common belief involved in our fear is that we often hold ourselves to “expert-level” standards. We learn that audience members look for proof of our credibility, and new public speakers may wonder, “Why am I credible?” or “Why should someone listen to me?” At the beginning of this chapter, we asked that you imagine your favorite public speaker, and they may have years of experience speaking in public. While it’s important to view these speakers as informal mentors, it can also incite some anxiety. “Am I supposed to speak like them?” you may be wondering.

Likewise, many new college students operate under the false belief that intelligence and skill are “fixed.” In their minds, a person is either smart or skilled in something, or they are not. Some students apply this false belief to math and science subjects, saying things like “I’m just no good at math and I never will be,” or even worse, “I guess I am just not smart enough to be in college.” As you can tell, these beliefs can sabotage someone’s college career. Unfortunately, the same kind of false beliefs are applied to public speaking, and people conclude that because public speaking is hard, they are just not “natural” at it and have no inborn skill. They give up on improving and avoid public speaking at all costs. The classroom is a cool space to begin building some foundational knowledge around public speaking. Remember that you are building a critical thinking portfolio, so have patience with yourself and trust the educational process.

Finally, we often experience students believing the incongruent ideas that public speaking (as a class) should be an “easy A” and that they’d rather die than give a speech. Instead, remember that good public speaking takes time and energy because it is difficult. Public speaking asks you to engage and advocate on behalf of yourselves and others who may not be able to access spaces to advocate for themselves.

Public speaking is also embodied: it requires the activation of and communication through your entire body. Unlike writing an essay or posting a picture online, public speaking requires that your entire body deliver a message, and that can feel odd for many of us. Consequently, learning public speaking means you must train your body to be comfortable and move in predictable and effective ways. This all happens in front of other people–scary! This is difficult work, so of course it’s viewed as fear-inducing for some.

New speakers may doubt their credibility or believe skills are innate rather than learned. Such beliefs discourage growth. Instead, public speaking should be viewed as a skill developed through patience and practice.

Addressing Public Speaking Anxiety

If you have experienced some anxiety around speaking, you know that it can be merely aggravating or completely overwhelming. In this section, we provide some guidance and strategies to address public speaking apprehension.

Strategies to Reduce Apprehension

- **Mental preparation:** Focus on the audience and message; practice mindfulness; reframe negative thoughts.
- **Physical preparation:** Ensure adequate sleep, nutrition, and relaxation. Stretching or breathing exercises help release nervous energy (Mitru, Millrood, & Mateika, 2002).
- **Contextual preparation:** Familiarize yourself with the venue, arrive early, and practice in similar settings.
- **Speech preparation**: Rehearse aloud, using full-body delivery and visual aids. Recording practice sessions can improve awareness of nonverbal communication.

Remember, you never appear as nervous as you feel. Supportive audiences can further reduce anxiety by offering attentive listening, positive nonverbal feedback, and thoughtful questions. Hence why it's critical that when a part of a public speaking

course or setting, you are also an attentive listener ready to pose thoughtful questions. A supportive community in any public speaking setting can fervently transform the state of anxiety around public speaking.

The Privilege of Advocacy

Public speaking is the act of delivering purposeful messages to audiences within contexts that are constitutive, contextual, and cultural. It is always an act of advocacy: selecting, framing, and presenting information that has personal, social, and ethical implications. While public speaking often provokes apprehension, preparation and practice enable speakers to engage responsibly and meaningfully.

Being given an audience is a privilege. Ethical advocacy ensures that privilege is used to empower, inform, and inspire.

Key Takeaways

- Every act of public speaking is a form of advocacy, requiring speakers to present ideas with purpose, balance personal and community interests, and consider the ethical implications of their message.
- Speakers must communicate truthfully, give proper credit, avoid defamation or hate speech, and maintain integrity to build credibility and trust with their audience.
- Speech shapes meaning and social realities (constitutive), is influenced by time and place (contextual), and reflects shared values and norms (cultural). Effective speakers are reflexive about these influences.
- Anxiety is normal, even for experienced speakers. Mental, physical, contextual, and speech preparation strategies help reduce apprehension and improve performance.
- Being given an audience is a privilege. Ethical advocacy ensures that speakers use this opportunity to inform, empower, and inspire positive engagement within communities.

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14.5: Chapter Wrap-Up

Review

This chapter explored public speaking as a powerful form of advocacy and civic engagement. Public speaking is more than delivering information; it involves influencing audiences through purposeful communication within specific cultural and social contexts. Ethical speakers recognize that communication shapes meaning, reflects values, and carries responsibility. Because advocacy can empower or marginalize communities, speakers must communicate with honesty, reflexivity, and respect for diverse perspectives.

The chapter also emphasized the importance of understanding audiences in persuasive communication. Effective speakers analyze audience demographics, beliefs, values, and needs while avoiding stereotypes and assumptions. Concepts such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, explicit and implied audiences, and active listening demonstrate that successful communication depends on building meaningful relationships with audiences and recognizing the broader communities affected by speech.

Persuasion itself was presented as a process of influencing beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors through propositions of fact, value, and policy. Speakers use organizational strategies such as categorical patterns, problem-solution structures, and Monroe's Motivated Sequence to guide audiences toward understanding and action. The chapter further highlighted the persuasive continuum, cognitive dissonance, and barriers to persuasion, showing that audiences often resist change and require thoughtful, ethical engagement.

A major focus of the chapter was rhetoric, defined as the art of persuasion. Drawing from Aristotle's rhetorical tradition, the chapter explained the three rhetorical appeals: logos (logic), pathos (emotion), and ethos (credibility and values). Effective persuasion requires balancing all three appeals while also considering rhetorical situations, including exigence, audience, and constraints. Maintaining rhetorical balance helps speakers avoid manipulative or ineffective communication.

Finally, the chapter addressed communication apprehension and the challenges many people experience when speaking publicly. Public speaking anxiety is common, but preparation, rehearsal, mindfulness, and supportive listening environments can reduce fear and improve performance. Ultimately, the chapter framed public speaking as both a skill and a privilege: one that allows individuals to advocate ethically, engage communities, and inspire meaningful change.

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14.6: Alternative Descriptions for Chapter 14

Figure 13.2.3: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The image is a vertical pyramid divided into five horizontal layers, each representing a different level of human needs as proposed by psychologist Abraham Maslow. The pyramid is oriented with the broadest section at the bottom, narrowing towards the top. Each layer is labeled with a specific category of needs, starting from the base and ascending to the peak.

The bottom layer, called Physiological Needs, includes basic survival requirements such as food, water, shelter, warmth, and sleep. Above this, the Safety Needs layer represents the desire for personal security, employment, resources, health, and property. The third layer, Love and Belonging Needs, addresses the human desire for interpersonal relationships, including friendships, family, intimacy, and a sense of connection. The fourth layer, Esteem Needs, reflects the pursuit of self-esteem and the esteem of others, encompassing feelings of accomplishment, prestige, and recognition. The top layer, Self-Actualization, represents the realization of personal potential, self-fulfillment, personal growth, and peak experiences.

Each layer is visually distinct, with labels placed inside the corresponding sections, and the pyramid as a whole illustrates Maslow's theory that higher-level needs become prominent only after lower-level needs are satisfied.

Figure 13.3.1: The Rhetorical Situation

The very top of the image is labeled “The Rhetorical Situation.” The diagram shows three large, overlapping circles forming a Venn-style layout. The top circle, colored blue, is labeled Writer, representing the individual creating the message. The left circle, colored light green, is labeled Subject, representing the topic being discussed. The right circle, colored mint green, is labeled Audience, representing the intended recipients of the message.

Where the Writer and Subject circles overlap, the label Exigence appears, representing the issue or problem motivating the writer. Between Writer and Audience is Purpose, indicating what the writer hopes to achieve with the audience. Between Subject and Audience is Genre, showing how the subject is communicated to the audience. At the center where all three circles overlap is Text, representing the actual message.

Several arrows point away from these elements with explanatory notes: an arrow from Context points away from the Subject circle and says “who is discussing this, where/when is this an issue, etc.” Another arrow from Exigence says “why the writer is writing about this subject.” An arrow from Genre says “how the subject is presented to the audience,” and an arrow from Purpose says “what the writer is seeking from the audience.” This visual emphasizes how the writer, subject, and audience interact, with overlapping areas highlighting the relationships that shape communication.

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14.8: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials

The following two subsections provide a starting point for exercises and discussion questions designed to support learning and spark dialogue. We hope instructors will adapt and expand on these materials to best fit their own classroom contexts and teaching goals.

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14.8.1: Exercises

13.1: Defining Persuasive Speaking

1. Read a short list of statements (you can provide examples from current events or create new ones). Identify whether each statement is a proposition of fact, value, or policy. Example: “Electric scooters reduce urban traffic congestion.” (Fact/Value/Policy?)
2. Using the persuasive continuum (-3 to +3), have students pick a controversial topic (e.g., campus recycling, climate change) and estimate where different audience segments (peers, local community, policymakers) fall on the scale. Then, ask students to draft a strategy for moving audiences one or two steps toward agreement.
3. Provide short speech excerpts or social media posts. Students identify rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) and any fallacies (false cause, slippery slope, hasty generalization, etc.). For example: “If we allow electric scooters, soon cars will be banned in cities!” → identify as slippery slope.

13.2: Centering Our Audience

1. Pick a speech topic (e.g., campus sustainability, mental health resources, or a current political issue). Identify the explicit audience (physically present), the implied audience (represented groups), and any your own considerations as a reflective listener. Describe how you would tailor your message to engage all three audience dimensions.
2. Provide a short audience profile (e.g., college students attending a financial literacy seminar). Identify which levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs are most salient for this audience. Draft one sentence showing how you would frame your message to connect with the audience’s unmet needs.
3. Watch or listen to a short speech (TED Talk, news segment, or lecture). Take notes using pen and paper, focusing on: main argument or purpose, two examples supporting the argument, and one question that arises while listening. Reflect on how your attention, distractions, and prior beliefs affected comprehension.

13.3: Defining Rhetoric

1. Find a short speech, TED Talk, or news segment. Identify examples of logos, pathos, and ethos in the message. For each example, explain why it fits the appeal type and how it contributes to persuasion.
2. Pick a current public issue (e.g., climate change policy, local school funding, or vaccination campaigns). Identify the exigence (problem), the rhetorical audience (who can act and be persuaded), and at least two constraints that might influence the message. Write a 3–4 sentence outline of how you would address this situation persuasively.
3. Draft a short paragraph (3–5 sentences) persuading someone to adopt a specific behavior or idea. Explicitly integrate logos, pathos, and ethos, and then explain which appeal is strongest and why. Reflect on potential overemphasis: could one appeal weaken the argument if overused?

13.4: Ethics, Power, Persuasion, and Advocacy

1. Think of a recent time you tried to influence someone’s opinion or behavior (e.g., sharing an article, giving advice, or supporting a friend). Identify your audience, message, and purpose. Evaluate whether your approach balanced personal interests with community impact and suggest one improvement.
2. Choose a topic for a short persuasive speech. Create an outline addressing these questions: Are my claims truthful and supported by evidence? Do I avoid defamatory or manipulative language? Am I representing other perspectives fairly? Revise your outline to strengthen ethical considerations.
3. Prepare a 2-minute speech on any topic. Apply strategies: reframe nervous thoughts into audience-focused goals (mental), practice posture, breathing, or stretching (practice), and rehearse in a space similar to your speaking venue (contextual). Record your delivery and note which strategies helped most in reducing apprehension.

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14.8.2: Discussion Questions

13.1: Defining Persuasive Speaking

1. When does persuasion cross the line into manipulation? How can speakers ethically balance influencing an audience with respecting autonomy?
2. How would you adapt a persuasive speech on climate change for audiences who strongly oppose the idea versus those who are neutral? What strategies from the persuasive continuum or cognitive dissonance theory would you use?
3. Pick a current controversy (local, national, or global). Formulate one proposition of fact, one proposition of value, and one proposition of policy for the issue. How would your choice of proposition affect the way you organize the speech and appeal to your audience?

13.2: Centering Our Audience

1. How might a speaker unintentionally neglect an implied audience? What are the ethical implications, and how could they address it effectively?
2. How can understanding audience needs, both conscious and unconscious, enhance the persuasive power of a speech? Can you think of a time you were persuaded because a speaker addressed an unspoken need?
3. What personal or environmental factors make listening difficult in a classroom or public speech? How can both speakers and audience members work together to overcome these barriers?

13.3: Defining Rhetoric

1. Think of a speech or advertisement that persuaded you strongly. Which mode of appeal (logos, pathos, or ethos) was most effective, and why? Could the message have been more persuasive with better balance?
2. How do constraints, such as audience beliefs, social norms, or medium, shape the way a message must be crafted? Can you think of a time a speaker failed to account for constraints?
3. Booth describes the pedant, advertiser, and entertainer stances. Which of these stances do you see most often in contemporary media or public speaking, and what makes it effective or ineffective?

13.4: Ethics, Power, Persuasion, and Advocacy

1. Why is public speaking considered a form of advocacy, and how does ethical responsibility affect this role?
2. How does communication shape meaning and cultural norms (constitutive and cultural dimensions), and why is reflexivity important for speakers?
3. Which preparation strategies (mental, physical, contextual, or speech rehearsal) are most effective for reducing public speaking anxiety, and why might some be more useful than others in different contexts?

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