COMMUNICATING WITH PURPOSE



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Communicating with Purpose



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page

Info Page

Licensing

1: Introduction to Communication Studies

1.1: Communication - History and Forms

1.2: The Communication Process

1.3: Communication Principles

1.4: Communication Competence

2: Self-Communication and Perception

2.1: Perception Process

2.2: Perceiving Others

2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

2.4: Improving Perception

3: Verbal Communication

3.1: Language and Meaning

3.2: Functions of Language

3.3: Using Words Well

3.4: Language, Society, and Culture

4: Nonverbal Communication

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

5: Listening

5.1: Listening Process

5.2: Importance of Listening

5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening

5.4: Improving Listening Competence

6: Interpersonal Communication and Conflict

6.1: Principles of Interpersonal Communication

6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

6.3: Emotions and Interpersonal Communication

6.4: Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Communication

7: Communication in Relationships

7.1: Foundations of Relationships

7.2: Communication and Friends

7.3: Communication and Families

7.4: Romantic Relationships

7.5: Relationships at Work

7.6: The Dark Side of Relationships

8: Intercultural Communication

8.1: Intercultural Communication Overview

8.2: Intercultural Identity

8.3: Discussing Intercultural Communication

8.4: Belonging

8.5: How Scholars Study Intercultural Communication

9: Small Group Communication

9.1: Understanding Small Groups

9.2: Small Group Development

9.3: Small Group Dynamics

10: Leadership, Roles, and Problem Solving in Groups

10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

10.2: Group Member Roles

10.3: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

11: Public Speaking

11.1: Public Speaking Overview

11.2: Audience Analysis

11.3: The Topic and Thesis

11.4: The Body

11.5: Introductions and Conclusions

11.6: Public Speaking Virtually

12: Preparing to Speak and Managing Apprehension

12.1: Incorporating Evidence/Sources

12.2: Visual Aids

12.3: Delivery

12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA)

12.5: Cognitive Restructuring and Building Confidence

13: Informative Speaking

13.1: Functions of Informative Speeches

13.2: Role of Speaker

13.3: Types of Informative Speeches
13.4: Developing Informative Speeches

14: Persuasive Speaking

14.1: What is Persuasive Speaking?
14.2: Approaching Audiences
14.3: Functions and Types of Persuasive Speeches
14.4: Persuasive Strategies
14.5: Persuasive Speech Organization

15: Mass Communication, Social Media, and Media Literacy

15.1: Defining Mass Communication
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0
15.4: Media Literacy

Index

Glossary

Discussion Questions/Conversation Starters

References

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1: INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION STUDIES

1.1: Communication - History and Forms
1.2: The Communication Process
1.3: Communication Principles
1.4: Communication Competence

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1.1: Communication - History and Forms

Learning Objectives

- Define communication.
- Discuss a brief history of communication.
- List the five forms of communication.
- Distinguish among the five forms of communication.

Before we dive into the history of communication, it is important that we have a shared understanding of what we mean by the word **communication**. For our purposes in this book, we will define communication as the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs that are influenced by multiple contexts.

A Brief History of Communication

Our focus in this book is on **human communication**. Even though all animals communicate, as human beings we have a special capacity to use symbols to communicate about things outside our immediate temporal and spatial reality (Dance & Larson). The ability to think outside our immediate reality is what allows us to create elaborate belief systems, art, philosophy, and academic theories.

The earliest period of human communication, the "Talking Era" (180,000 BCE–3500 BCE), relied on speech and gestures (Poe, 2011). This gave way to the "Manuscript Era," when writing emerged to support growing needs like recordkeeping and governance. Literacy remained limited to elites until the 1800s. The "Print Era" began with the invention of the printing press, enabling mass production of texts. This was followed by the "Audiovisual Era," marked by technologies like radio, telephone, and television. Since 1990, the "Internet Era" has brought rapid global communication through digital media.

The study of communication dates back to ancient Greece, with Aristotle providing one of the earliest systematic studies of rhetoric—persuasive and ethical speaking. Though the word "rhetoric" is sometimes used negatively today, it originally emphasized responsible and effective communication. From early on, communication has been closely tied to ethics and civic life. As a formal academic field, communication studies emerged just over a century ago. In 1914, speech teachers formed what became the National Communication Association. Some focused on content and argumentation, while others emphasized delivery and performance—interests still present in areas like public speaking and theatre. Over time, scholars shifted focus from just messages to the role of the communicator. James A. Winans emphasized two reasons to learn public speaking: to succeed and to serve others (Keith, 2008). With the rise of social psychology, communication studies expanded to include social and psychological contexts.



Today, communication departments explore a wide range of topics—from political speeches and media coverage to family

communication and cultural narratives—reflecting the depth and diversity of the field.

Forms of Communication

The five main forms of communication are **intrapersonal/self**, **interpersonal**, **group**, **public**, and **mass** communication. In the following we will discuss the similarities and differences among each form of communication, including its definition, level of intentionality, goals, and contexts.

Intrapersonal/Self Communication

Intrapersonal or **self-communication** is communication with oneself using internal vocalization or reflective thinking. Intrapersonal communication is triggered by some *internal* or *external* stimulus. We may, for example, communicate with ourself about what we want to eat due to the internal stimulus of hunger, or we may react intrapersonally to an event we witness. Unlike other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication takes place only inside our heads. The other forms of communication must be perceived by someone else to count as communication.

Intrapersonal communication serves several social functions. Internal vocalization, or talking to ourselves, can help us achieve or maintain social adjustment (Dance & Larson, 1972). For example, a person may use self-talk to calm himself down in a stressful situation, or a shy person may remind herself to smile during a social event. Intrapersonal communication also helps build and maintain our self-concept. We also use "self-talk" to let off steam, process emotions, think through something, or rehearse what we plan to say or do in the future. Competent intrapersonal communication helps facilitate social interaction and can enhance our well-being. Conversely, the breakdown in the ability of a person to intrapersonally communicate is associated with mental illness (Dance & Larson, 1972).

Sometimes we intrapersonally communicate for the fun of it. For example, you might daydream about winning the lottery, replay a funny moment from earlier in the day, or imagine how you'd respond in a fictional scenario. We also communicate intrapersonally to pass time, such as when you silently narrate what you're doing while completing a routine task or mentally wander while waiting in line. In both of these cases, self-communication is usually unplanned and doesn't include a clearly defined goal (Dance & Larson, 1972).

We can, however, engage in more intentional intrapersonal communication. For instance, you might mentally rehearse what you want to say before an interview, plan out how you'll handle a difficult conversation, or reflect on how your actions affected someone else. In fact, deliberate self-reflection can help us become more competent communicators as we become more mindful of our own behaviors. Your internal voice may praise you for speaking up, question a decision you made, or gently remind you to stay calm in a stressful moment. Intrapersonal communication is not created with the intention that another person will perceive it. In all the other levels, the fact that the communicator anticipates consumption of their message is very important.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is communication between people whose lives mutually influence one another. Interpersonal communication builds, maintains, and ends our relationships, and we spend more time engaged in interpersonal communication than the other forms of communication. Interpersonal communication occurs in various contexts and is addressed in subfields of study within communication studies such as intercultural communication, organizational communication, health communication, and computer-mediated communication. After all, interpersonal relationships exist in all those contexts.

Interpersonal communication can be planned or unplanned, but since it is interactive, it is usually more structured and influenced by social expectations than self-communication. Interpersonal communication is more goal oriented than self-communication and fulfills instrumental and relational needs. In terms of instrumental needs, the goal may be as minor as greeting someone to fulfill a morning ritual or as major as conveying your desire to be in a committed relationship with someone. Interpersonal communication meets relational needs by communicating the uniqueness of a specific relationship. Instances of miscommunication and communication conflict most frequently occur here (Dance & Larson, 1972). To be a competent interpersonal communicator, you need strong skills in conflict management, listening, and other areas to maintain positive relationships.

Group Communication

Group communication is communication among three or more people interacting to achieve a shared goal. Group work in an academic setting provides useful experience and preparation for group work in professional settings. Organizations have been moving toward more team-based work models, and whether we like it or not, groups are an integral part of people's lives.

Group communication is more intentional and formal than interpersonal communication. Individuals in a group are often assigned to their position within a group. Group communication is often task-focused, meaning that members of the group work together for an explicit purpose or goal that affects each member of the group. Since group members also communicate with and relate to each other interpersonally and may have preexisting relationships or develop them during the course of group interaction, elements of interpersonal communication occur within group communication too.

Public Communication

Public communication is a sender-focused form of communication in which one person is typically responsible for conveying information to an audience. Public speaking is something that many people fear, or at least don't enjoy. But, just like group communication, public speaking is an important part of our academic, professional, and civic lives. When compared to interpersonal and group communication, public communication is the most consistently intentional, formal, and goal-oriented form of communication we have discussed so far.

Mass Communication

Public communication becomes **mass communication** when it is transmitted to many people through print or electronic media. Radio, podcasts, and books are other examples of mass media. The technology required to send mass communication messages distinguishes it from the other forms of communication. A certain amount of intentionality goes into transmitting a mass communication message since it usually requires one or more extra steps to convey the message. The intentionality and goals of the person actually creating the message, such as the writer, television host, or talk show guest, can vary greatly.



Figure 1.1.4: Technological advances such as the printing press, television, and the more recent digital revolution have made mass communication a prominent feature of our daily lives. Savannah River Site – Atmospheric Technology – CC BY 2.0.

Unlike interpersonal, group, and public communication, there is no immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback loop in mass communication. New media technologies like TikTok, blogs, and X, make feedback more immediate. The technology to mass-produce and distribute communication messages brings with it the power for one voice or a series of voices to reach and affect many people. The potential consequences of unethical mass communication are important to consider.

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1.2: The Communication Process

Learning Objectives

- Identify and define the components of the transmission model of communication.
- Identify and define the components of the interaction model of communication.
- Identify and define the components of the transaction model of communication.

Communication is a complex precess and it is difficult to determine where or with whom a communication encounter starts and ends. Models of communication simplify the process by providing a visual representation of the various aspects of a communication encounter. Models serve a valuable purpose for students of communication because they allow us to see specific concepts and steps within the process of communication, define communication, and apply communication concepts. The three models of communication we will discuss are the transmission, interaction, and transaction models.

In communication models, the participants are the senders and/or receivers of messages in a communication encounter. The message is the verbal or nonverbal content being conveyed from sender to receiver. Encoding is the process of turning thoughts into communication. Of course, we don't just communicate verbally—we have various options, or channels for communication. Encoded messages are sent through a channel, or a sensory route on which a message travels, to the receiver for decoding. While communication can be sent and received using any sensory route (sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound), most communication occurs through visual (sight) and/or auditory (sound) channels. If your roommate has headphones on and is engrossed in a video game, you may need to get his attention by waving a beer in front of him before you can ask him about dinner.

Transmission Model of Communication

The **transmission model** sees communication as a **one-way process** where a **sender sends a message to a receiver** (Ellis & McClintock, 1990). The sender is responsible for clarity, but **noise**—like background sounds or unclear language—can distort the message. While limited for face-to-face interaction, this model works well for **texting**, where communication is often one-sided and prone to misunderstandings.

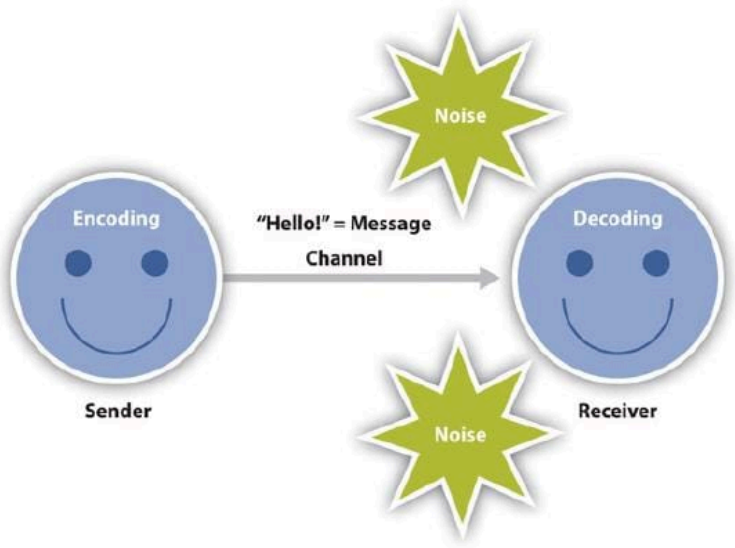


Figure 1.2.1 The Transmission Model of Communication

The **interaction model** sees communication as a **two-way process**, where people take turns sending messages and giving **feedback** (Schramm, 1997). Instead of one sender and one receiver, both participants are **sender-receivers**, actively exchanging

messages to create meaning.

This model focuses on the **interaction** itself, not just the message. It also considers **context**:

- **Physical context** includes things like space, lighting, and temperature.
- **Psychological context** includes emotions, stress, or mental state.

By adding feedback and context, this model offers a clearer picture of how communication works in real-life situations.

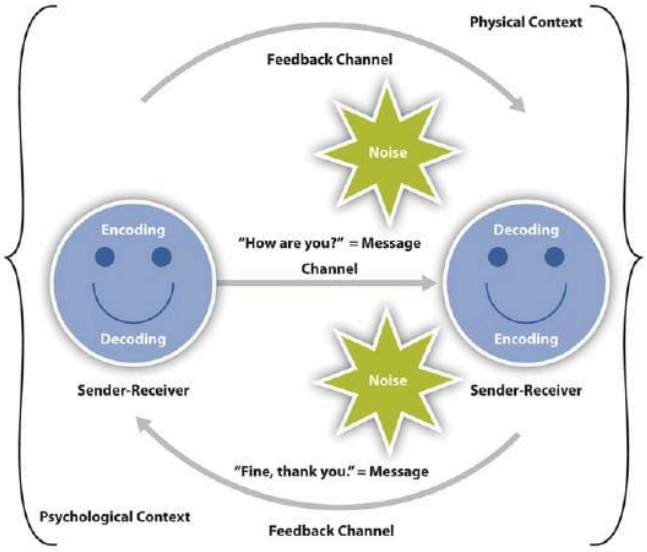


Figure 1.2.2 The Interaction Model of Communication

Transaction Model of Communication

The **transaction model** views communication as a **dynamic, ongoing process** where people create shared meaning and build relationships within social, cultural, and relational contexts (Barnlund, 1970). Unlike earlier models, communicators are **simultaneously senders and receivers**, constantly adapting based on feedback.

This model shows that communication doesn't just reflect reality—it **helps shape it**. It also emphasizes that **context matters**:

- **Social context** includes rules and norms we learn from society (e.g., don't interrupt, say thank you).
- **Relational context** involves our history and relationship with the person (e.g., we talk differently to a friend than a boss).
- **Cultural context** reflects aspects of identity—like race, gender, or class—which influence how we communicate and how others respond to us.

Cultural differences can create challenges, but avoiding them limits growth. Becoming a skilled communicator means being open-minded, avoiding assumptions, and learning through practice.

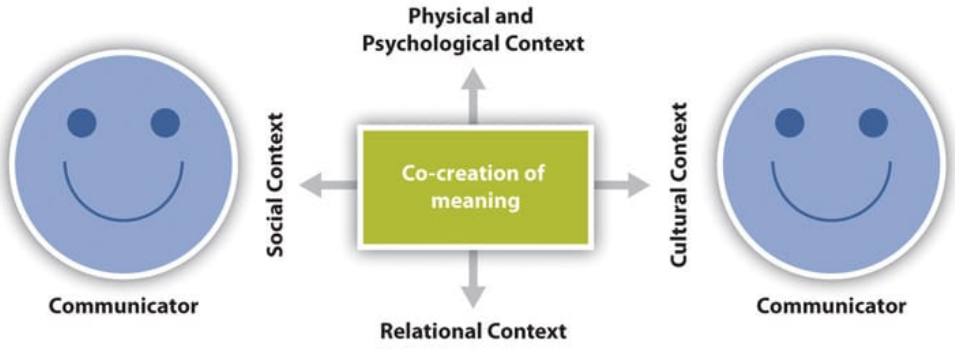


Figure 1.2.3 The Transaction Model of Communication

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1.3: Communication Principles

Learning Objectives

- Discuss how communication is integrated in various aspects of your life.
- Explain how communication meets physical, instrumental, relational, and identity needs.
- Explain how the notion of a "process" fits into communication.
- Discuss the ways in which communication is guided by culture and context.

Putting communication at the front of your mind and becoming more aware of how you communicate can be informative and have many positive effects. Studying communication allows us to see more of what was going on around us, which allows us to more actively and competently participate in various communication contexts. In this section, as we learn the principles of communication, I encourage you to take note of aspects of communication that you haven't thought about before and begin to apply the principles of communication to various parts of your life.

Communication Meets Needs

While the content of our communication may help us achieve certain physical and instrumental needs, it also feeds into our identities and relationships in ways that far exceed the content of what we say. The four needs we will focus on are **Physical Needs, Instrumental Needs, Relational Needs,** and **Identity Needs.**

Physical Needs

Physical needs include needs that keep our bodies and minds functioning. There are strong ties between the social function of communication and our physical and psychological health. Human beings are social creatures, which makes communication important for our survival. In fact, prolonged isolation has been shown to severely damage a human (Williams & Zadro, 2001). Communication skills can also help us thrive. People with good interpersonal communication skills are better able to adapt to stress and have less depression and anxiety (Hargie, 2011). Communication can also be therapeutic, which can lessen or prevent physical problems. A research study found that spouses of suicide or accidental death victims who did not communicate about the death with their friends were more likely to have health problems such as weight change and headaches than those who did talk with friends (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). Satisfying physical needs is essential for our physical functioning and survival. But, in order to socially function and thrive, we must also meet instrumental, relational, and identity needs.

Instrumental Needs

Instrumental needs include needs that help us get things done in our day-to-day lives and achieve short- and long-term goals. We all have short- and long-term goals that we work on every day. Fulfilling these goals is an ongoing communicative task, which means we spend much of our time communicating for instrumental needs. Some common instrumental needs include influencing others, getting information we need, or getting support (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). In short, communication that meets our instrumental needs helps us "get things done."

To meet instrumental needs, we often use communication strategically. Politicians, parents, bosses, and friends use communication to influence others in order to accomplish goals and meet needs. There is a research area within communication that examines compliance-gaining communication, or communication aimed at getting people to do something or act in a particular way (Gass & Seiter, 1999). While research on persuasion typically focuses on public speaking and how a speaker persuades a group, compliance-gaining research focuses on our daily interpersonal interactions. Researchers have identified many tactics that people typically use in compliance-gaining communication (Gass & Seiter, 1999).

Some possible ways to gain compliance:

- **Offering rewards.** Seeks compliance in a positive way, by promising returns, rewards, or generally positive outcomes.
- **Threatening punishment.** Seeks compliance in a negative way, 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

Communicating for relational needs helps us achieve the social relating that is an essential part of being human. Communication meets our relational needs by giving us a tool through which to develop, maintain, and end relationships. Although our relationships vary in terms of closeness and intimacy, all individuals have relational needs and all relationships require maintenance. Finally, communication or the lack of it helps us end relationships. We may communicate our deteriorating commitment to a relationship by avoiding communication with someone, verbally criticizing him or her, or explicitly ending a relationship. From spending time together, to checking in with relational partners by text, social media, or face-to-face, to celebrating accomplishments, to providing support during difficult times, communication forms the building blocks of our relationships.

Identity Needs

Identity needs include our need to present ourselves to others and be thought of in particular and desired ways. Much of how we think of ourselves is based on our communication with other people. Our identity changes as we progress through life, and communication is the primary means of establishing our identity and fulfilling our identity needs. Communication allows us to present ourselves to others in particular ways. Just as many companies, celebrities, and politicians create a public image, most of us present different faces in different contexts. The influential scholar Erving Goffman compared self-presentation to a performance and suggested we all perform different roles in different contexts (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, competent communicators can successfully manage how others perceive them by adapting to situations and contexts.

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). When we refer to communication as a process, we imply that it doesn't have a distinct beginning and end or follow a predetermined sequence of events. It can be difficult to trace the origin of a communication encounter, since communication doesn't always follow a neat and discernible format, which makes studying communication interactions or phenomena difficult. Any time we pull one part of the process out for study or closer examination, we artificially "freeze" the process in order to examine it, which is not something that is possible when communicating in real life. These snapshots are useful, though, 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).

The dynamic nature of communication allows us to examine some principles of communication that are related to its processual nature. Next, we will learn that communication messages vary in terms of their level of conscious thought and intention, communication is irreversible, and communication is unrepeatable.

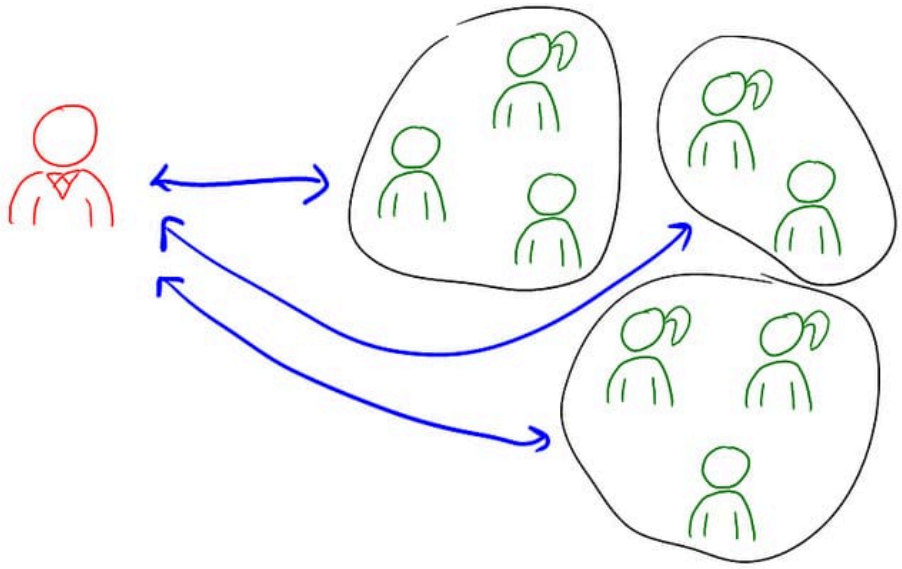


Figure 1.3.1 Since communication is such a dynamic process, it is difficult to determine where communication begins and ends.

Mathieu Plourde – Instructor to Groups – CC BY 2.0.

Communication messages vary in terms of the amount of conscious thought that goes into their creation. In general, we can say that intentional communication usually includes more conscious thought and unintentional communication usually includes less. For example, some communication is reactionary and almost completely involuntary. We often scream when we are frightened, say "ouch!" when we stub our toe, and stare blankly when we are bored. Some of our interactions are slightly more substantial and include more conscious thought but are still very routine. For example, we say "excuse me" when we need to get past someone, say "thank you" when someone holds the door for us, or say "what's up?" to our neighbor we pass every day in the hall. The messages most studied by communication scholars are considered constructed communication. These messages include more conscious thought and intention than reactionary or routine messages and often go beyond information exchange to also meet relational and identity needs. Ethical communicators cannot avoid responsibility for the effects of what they say by claiming they didn't "intend" for their communication to cause an undesired effect. Communication has short- and long-term effects, which illustrates the next principle we will discuss—communication is irreversible.

The dynamic nature of the communication process also means that communication is irreversible. Miscommunication can occur regardless of the degree of conscious thought and intention put into a message. In addition to communication being irreversible, it is also unrepeatable.

Even if the words and actions stay the same, the physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts will vary and ultimately change the communication encounter. Have you ever tried to recount a funny or interesting experience to a friend who doesn't really seem that impressed? These "I guess you had to be there" moments illustrate the fact that communication is unrepeatable.

Communication Is Guided by Culture and Context

Context is a dynamic component of the communication process. Culture and context also influence how we perceive and define communication. Western culture tends to put more value on senders than receivers and on the content rather the context of a message. Cultures vary in terms of having a more individualistic or more collectivistic cultural orientation. The United States is considered an individualistic culture, where emphasis is put on individual expression and success. Japan is considered a collectivistic culture, where emphasis is put on group cohesion and harmony. These are strong cultural values that are embedded in how we learn to communicate. In many collectivistic cultures, there is more emphasis placed on silence and nonverbal context. Whether in the United States, Japan, or another country, people are socialized from birth to communicate in culturally specific ways that vary by context. In this section we will discuss how communication is learned, the rules and norms that influence how we communicate, and the ethical implications of communication.

Communication Is Learned

Everyone communicates differently. This is because communication is learned rather than innate. As we have already seen, communication patterns are relative to the context and culture in which one is communicating, and many cultures have distinct languages consisting of symbols.

A key principle of communication is that it is symbolic. Communication is symbolic in that the words that make up our language systems do not directly correspond to something in reality. Instead, they stand in for or symbolize something.

All symbolic communication is learned, negotiated, and dynamic. In English, we learned that t-e-a-c-h-e-r refers to an individual who guides the learning and s-t-u-d-e-n-t refers to an individual who is being guided. We could have just as logically reversed the meaning of each word because the letters do not actually refer to the person. The word only has the meaning that we assign to it. We are all socialized into different languages, but we also speak different "languages" based on the situation we are in. Best friends, for example, have their own inside terminology and expressions that wouldn't make sense to anyone else. This example isn't on the same scale as differing languages, but it still indicates that communication is learned. It also illustrates how rules and norms influence how we communicate.

Rules and Norms

Whether verbal or nonverbal, mediated or interpersonal, our communication is guided by rules and norms. Phatic communion is an instructive example of how we communicate under the influence of rules and norms (Senft, 2009). Phatic communion refers to scripted and routine verbal interactions that are intended to establish social bonds rather than actually exchange meaning. When you pass your classmate in the hall, the exchange may go as follows:

Example 1.3.1

You:
"Hey, how are you?"

Classmate:
"Fine, how are you?"

You:
"Fine."

What is the point of this interaction? It surely isn't to actually inquire as to each other's well-being. . You and your classmate might as well just pass each other in the hall and say the following to each other:

You:
"Generic greeting question."

Classmate:
"Generic greeting response and question."

You:
"Generic response."

If phatic communion is so "pointless," why do we do it?

In addition to finding communion through food or religion, we also find communion through our words. But the degree to which and in what circumstances we engage in phatic communion is also influenced by norms and rules. We conform to social norms through this routine type of verbal exchange.

Phatic communion is culturally relative as well. While most cultures engage in phatic communion, the topics of and occasions for phatic communion vary.

Communication Has Ethical Implications

Communication ethics deals with the process of negotiating and reflecting on our actions and communication regarding what we believe to be right and wrong. In communication ethics, we are more concerned with the decisions people make about what is right and wrong than the systems, philosophies, or religions that inform those decisions. Much of ethics is gray area. Aristotle said that we should act “to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way.” This quote connects to communication competence, which focuses on communicating effectively and appropriately.

Communication has broad ethical implications. Hopefully you can already see that communication ethics is integrated into academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.

When dealing with communication ethics, it’s difficult to state that something is 100 percent ethical or unethical. If, in a situation, we make a decision and we reflect on it and realize we could have made a more ethical choice, does that make us a bad person? While many behaviors can be more easily labeled as ethical or unethical, communication isn’t always as clear. Murdering someone is generally thought of as unethical and illegal, but many instances of hurtful speech, or even what some would consider hate speech, have been protected as free speech. This shows the complicated relationship between protected speech, ethical speech, and the law. Since many of the choices we make when it comes to ethics are situational, contextual, and personal, various professional fields have developed codes of ethics to help guide members through areas that might otherwise be gray or uncertain.

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1.4: Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

- Define communication competence.
- Explain each part of the definition of communication competence.
- Discuss strategies for developing communication competence.
- Discuss communication apprehension and consider strategies to manage it.

Defining Competence

Communication competence is knowing how to communicate effectively and appropriately, and being able to apply that knowledge in different situations (Cooley & Roach, 1984). It involves three key components: knowledge, skill, and adaptability. Knowledge refers to understanding what effective communication looks like and why it works, which can be learned through observation or instruction. Skill is the ability to put that knowledge into practice, though factors like age, mood, stress, or anxiety can affect performance. Adaptability means adjusting communication based on the situation, as what's considered competent can vary across cultures, relationships, and power dynamics. For example, a non-native speaker may be seen as highly competent in one setting but unfairly judged in another.

The **National Communication Association** outlines key skills for competence, especially in speaking and listening. These include:

1. State ideas clearly.
2. Communicate ethically.
3. Recognize when it is appropriate to communicate.
4. Identify their communication goals.
5. Select the most appropriate and effective medium for communicating.
6. Demonstrate credibility.
7. Identify and manage misunderstandings.
8. Manage conflict.
9. Be open-minded about another's point of view.
10. Listen attentively.

These competencies can provide you with a concrete way to assess your own speaking competencies and to prepare yourself for professional speaking and listening, which is often skill driven.



Image 1.4.1 Fitting Together the Pieces

Developing Competence

Developing communication competence starts with understanding what it is. Everyone already has some communication experience, but competence involves more than just knowing how to talk. It includes knowledge, motivation, and skill—knowing what works, wanting to improve, and being able to do it. We learn communication both through direct instruction (like learning a language) and through experience (like reading body language).

> We all have strengths and weaknesses in how we communicate. Improving takes effort, and people move through different stages of competence:
>
> - **Unconscious incompetence** (you don't know what you're doing wrong),
> - **Conscious incompetence** (you realize what needs work),
> - **Conscious competence** (you're doing well but still have to focus),
> - **Unconscious competence** (good communication becomes natural).

Progress isn't always steady—you may switch stages depending on the situation or person. Even communication experts aren't perfect. Being aware of when you slip up and reflecting on it is a key part of growth. If you're doing that, you're already ahead.

A major step toward competence is becoming a **mindful communicator**—someone who pays attention, adapts to different situations, and considers other perspectives. Mindful communication helps avoid misunderstandings, manage conflict, and reach goals. For example, asking someone to repeat your instructions shows awareness that messages can be misunderstood. On the other hand, ignoring a partner during conflict or being passive-aggressive shows a lack of mindfulness, even if we know better. We all slip sometimes, but becoming more aware and intentional is how we improve.

Overcoming Anxiety

Communication apprehension (CA) is the fear or anxiety about communicating with others, and it's very common among college students. About 15-20% have high anxiety, and 70% experience some level of it. CA isn't just about public speaking—it can happen in many situations. CA causes physical and mental stress before or during a presentation. Research shows that methods like gradual exposure, changing negative thoughts, and skills training can help reduce this anxiety. Communication classes are important because CA can hurt academic performance and how others view your communication skills—even if you're well-prepared and knowledgeable. We will cover this, and how to handle it, more as we prepare for your speeches in this class. This is something that we will explore more in Chapter 12 with relationship to our speeches.

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2: SELF-COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTION

2.1: Perception Process
2.2: Perceiving Others
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self
2.4: Improving Perception

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2.1: Perception Process

Learning Objectives

- Define perception.
- Discuss how salience influences the selection of perceptual information.
- Explain the ways in which we organize perceptual information.
- Discuss the role of schemata in the interpretation of perceptual information.

Perception is the process of **selecting, organizing,** and **interpreting** information**.** This process, which is shown in Figure 2.1 "The Perception 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 make 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 on through the perception process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). **Selecting** is the first part of the perception process, in which we focus our attention on certain incoming sensory information. How do we decide what to select and what to leave out?

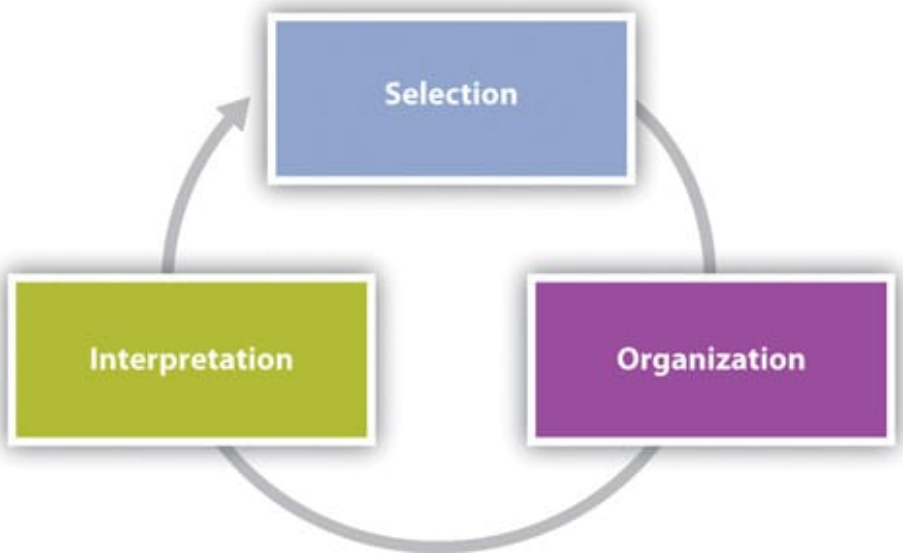


Figure 2.1.1: The Perception Process

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, a person's identity as a Native American 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.

Stimulating Our Senses

It is probably not surprising to learn that visually and/or aurally stimulating things become **salient** in our perceptual field and get our attention. Having our senses stimulated isn't always a positive thing. Think about the couple that won't stop talking during the movie or the upstairs neighbor whose subwoofer 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.

We tend to pay attention to information that we perceive to meet our needs or interests in some way. 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. When we don't think certain messages meet our needs, stimuli that would normally get our attention may be completely lost. 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.

We also find salient information that interests us. Of course, many times, stimuli that meet our needs are also interesting, but 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. 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.

Our expectations also play a role in what we find salient. For example, if you're waiting for a package, you may pay extra attention to any sound outside. That's because you're expecting it. On the other hand, we also notice things that are unusual—like if a normally quiet friend suddenly speaks loudly, or if someone shows up to class dressed as a wizard. Unexpected things have to be noticeably different to stand out. So, we notice what we expect *and* what surprises us—if it's different enough.

Organizing Information

Organizing is the second step in perception, where we sort information using patterns we've learned. We often organize based on proximity (things close together belong together), similarity (things that look or act alike are grouped), and difference (things that stand out are seen as separate). For example, people standing near each other may be assumed to be together, or people who look similar may be seen as related. Differences, especially based on race or background, can lead to incorrect and even offensive assumptions.

These organizing habits are natural and help us manage information, but the *judgments* we attach to them are learned. While pattern recognition is useful for everyday life, it becomes harmful when it leads to stereotypes or unfair treatment.

We also organize communication experiences based on our personal point of view. This is called punctuation—how we decide where an interaction begins and ends. For instance, if one person thinks a conflict started days ago and the other just became aware of it, their mismatched views can create more tension. Being aware of how we organize and interpret events helps reduce misunderstandings and improves communication.



Image 2.1.1 An Organized Brain

Interpreting Information

Interpretation is the third step in the perception process. It's when we assign meaning to what we experience using mental frameworks called **schemata**—stored knowledge from past experiences. These help us make sense of new situations. For example, we have a schema for school that includes things like teachers, homework, grades, and classmates. As we move through different stages of education, we update our schema to match new expectations. If we don't, we may struggle to understand or adapt to new situations.

Schemata also influence how we act and communicate. If you assume someone is shy based on your schema, you might not ask them to present in a group project. Schemata guide our behavior in familiar situations—like how to act in a classroom or on a job interview.

We often interpret others based on factors like their job, age, race, or background. These impressions help us decide how to interact. But to be effective communicators, we must be open to updating our schemata as we gain new experiences—just like updating apps to improve how they work.

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2.2: Perceiving Others

Learning Objectives

- Differentiate between internal and external attributions.
- Explain two common perceptual errors: the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias.
- Discuss how the primacy and recency effects relate to first and last impressions.
- Discuss how physical and environmental factors influence perception.
- Explain the horn and halo effects.
- Recognize the role that personality plays in the perception of others.

As you read this section, keep in mind that 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

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 means we're trying 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. Imagine that Gloria and Jane are dating. One day, Jane gets frustrated and raises her voice to Gloria. She may find that behavior more offensive and even consider breaking up with her if she attributes the cause of the blow up to her personality, since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change.

For example, if Jane yells at Gloria, Gloria might react differently depending on her interpretation. If she thinks Jane is just an angry person (internal), she might want to break up. But if she believes Jane is stressed from work (external), she might be more understanding. One common mistake is the **fundamental attribution error**—we often blame others' actions on their personality, not the situation. For instance, a student might get a parking ticket and assume the officer is just mean, rather than admitting they parked illegally. We also show **self-serving bias**: when things go well, we credit ourselves ("I passed because I studied"); when they don't, we blame outside factors ("I failed because the quiz was unfair"). These habits shape how we communicate. If we blame personality, we're more likely to react strongly or avoid the person. Being aware of these biases helps us better understand others—and ourselves. We'll explore how to check and improve these perceptions later.

Impressions and Interpretation

As we perceive others, we make impressions about their personality, likeability, attractiveness, and other characteristics. Although much 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.

First and Last Impressions



Image 2.2.1 "First Impressions Last"

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. 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 to 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. Imagine that a professor has maintained a relatively high level of credibility with you over the course of the quarter. 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 did get 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 quarter. 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. Clothing, grooming, and body features all send messages, especially in professional settings. For example, we have expectations for how someone should dress at work, at home, or at a formal event. We also associate certain looks with social groups or professions—like how we

might picture a doctor, mechanic, or goth person. These mental images, or *schema*, come from personal experience and media, and they often include **stereotypes**. Physical features like facial symmetry and body size also influence how we see others. People seen as more attractive are often judged more positively—they receive more smiles, eye contact, and attention.

Our environment matters too. The objects around us—like the way a bedroom or office is decorated—can shape how others view our personality. For example, a messy office or an unusual poster might affect how seriously someone is taken at work.

Even furniture arrangement can influence perception—a round table may feel more welcoming than a long boardroom table. These physical and environmental cues shape our first impressions and continue to affect how we view people over time, which connects to ideas like the **halo effect** (assuming someone is good based on one positive trait) and the **horn effect** (assuming someone is bad based on one negative trait).

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 horn 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 professional job. Nell has recently graduated with her degree in communication studies and is looking to start her career as a corporate trainer. If one of Nell's professors has a relationship with an executive at an area business, his positive verbal recommendation will likely result in a halo effect for Nell. Since the executive thinks highly of his friend the professor, and the professor things highly of Nell, then the executive will start his interaction with Nell 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. On the other hand, let's say Nell doesn't have a third party to help make a connection and arrives late for her interview. That negative impression may create a horn effect that carries through the interview. Even if Nell 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 is 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 in regards to the impressions we form of others.

Culture

Our perceptions are shaped by cultural identities like race, gender, class, age, ability, nationality, and sexual orientation. As we grow up in different cultures, we adopt shared beliefs and values that influence how we interpret the world. People from different cultures often have different *schemata*—mental frameworks—that affect how they see things.

Unless we're exposed to diverse perspectives, we might assume everyone sees the world as we do. Experiencing different cultures doesn't mean we have to change our views, but it helps us understand where others are coming from—and how our own views were shaped.

> Even basic senses like sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell are influenced by culture:
>
> - **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 to some other cultures; 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.** Tastes for foods vary greatly around the world. “Stinky tofu,” which is a favorite snack of people in Taipei, Taiwan’s famous night market, would likely be very off-putting in terms of taste and smell to many foreign tourists.
- **Smell.** While US Americans spend considerable effort to mask natural body odor, which we typically find unpleasant, with soaps, sprays, and lotions, some other cultures would not find unpleasant or even notice what we consider “b.o.” Those same cultures may find a US American’s “clean” (soapy, perfumed, deodorized) smell unpleasant.

Cultural views also differ on bigger topics like marriage, politics, and privacy. For example, France’s president once lived openly with his unmarried partner—something that would likely be controversial in the U.S. or unacceptable in places like Saudi Arabia or the Vatican.

We tend to see people as “like us” or “different from us,” and we often trust or relate more to those we see as similar. When someone different from us behaves badly, we’re more likely to blame their character than their situation. This kind of rigid thinking can lead to **stereotypes**, **prejudice**, and **discrimination**. And since some identities—like sexual orientation or disability—aren’t always visible, we may not even realize someone is culturally different until they tell us.

Gender also affects perception, but much of what we believe about gender differences is socialized, or learned, not biological. Society teaches us to see men and women as very different, but research shows we actually communicate more similarly than we think. Next, we’ll explore how our individual personalities affect perception.

Personality

Employers often ask about a candidate’s personality because it affects how people see themselves, interact with others, and perform at work. **Personality** is a person’s typical way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. While it can change, most traits stay fairly consistent in adulthood.

Researchers commonly refer to the **Big Five Personality Traits**:

1. **Extraversion** – Outgoing and social (extroverts) vs. quiet and reserved (introverts).
2. **Agreeableness** – Friendly and cooperative vs. suspicious and difficult.
3. **Conscientiousness** – Organized and dependable vs. careless and unreliable.
4. **Neuroticism** – Emotionally unstable and anxious vs. calm and steady.
5. **Openness** – Curious and open-minded vs. rigid and resistant to change.

Companies and media use personality tests to make decisions—from hiring to casting TV roles—because personality strongly influences behavior and audience reactions.

We often notice traits in others that matter to us personally. If you value loyalty, you’ll admire it in others. If you dislike negativity in yourself, you may be critical of it in someone else. We also tend to assume others are like us—a bias called **assumed similarity**. When we don’t know much about someone, we fill in the blanks with traits we see in ourselves. But people don’t always group based on similar personalities. Shared race, class, or values are usually more influential than personality alone.

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2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

Learning Objectives

- Define self-concept and discuss how we develop our self-concept.
- Define self-esteem and discuss how we develop self-esteem.
- Explain how social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory influence self-perception.
- Discuss how social norms, family, and media influence self-perception.
- Define self-presentation and discuss common self-presentation strategies.

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 is how you see yourself—your traits, group memberships, and roles. It changes depending on the situation. You might see yourself as funny or driven in one setting, and as a team member or Southerner in another.

We form our self-concept through interactions with others. The **looking-glass self** is the idea that we see ourselves based on how we think others see us. For example, if people often come to you for advice, you may view yourself as a good listener. We also shape our self-concept by comparing ourselves to others—this is called **social comparison**. We judge where we stand in terms of being better or worse (superior/inferior) or being similar or different. These comparisons help us evaluate ourselves, but they can be harmful if we choose unrealistic reference groups—like comparing your fitness to a pro athlete instead of to someone at your own level.

Context affects whether we want to fit in or stand out. Teens, in particular, feel pressure to compare themselves to peers. But our judgments aren't always accurate. For instance, a dancer may be just as athletic as a football player, even if we don't expect that.

Social comparisons can motivate or discourage us. In school, seeing class grade averages might push some students to work harder. But others might feel defeated or settle for less if they see others did just as poorly. These thoughts affect behavior. If someone believes they're a "bad student," they may stop trying, reinforcing that belief. Overall, our **self-concept**, along with related ideas like **self-esteem** and **self-efficacy**, is shaped by how we see ourselves, how others treat us, and how we compare ourselves to others.

Self-Esteem

Self-efficacy is your belief in your ability to do something specific, like giving a speech or solving a math problem. It influences your self-esteem, which then shapes your overall self-concept. For example, if Pedro does well on a speech and gets positive feedback, his confidence (self-efficacy) grows, which boosts his self-esteem and helps shape his identity as a "good public speaker."

Positive or negative feedback from others strongly affects both self-efficacy and self-esteem. Encouragement helps us try again and build confidence; harsh criticism can make us feel less capable and less motivated.

Self-discrepancy theory says that we have three versions of ourselves:

- **Actual self** – who we believe we are.
- **Ideal self** – who we want to be.
- **Ought self** – who we think we *should* be.

Conflicts between these selves can affect our emotions and behaviors:

- When the **actual self** doesn't match our **ideal**, we may feel frustrated or disappointed.
- When the **actual self** doesn't meet **others' ideals**, we may feel embarrassed or ashamed.
- When we fall short of **others' expectations** (their "ought"), we may feel anxious or fear judgment.
- When we don't meet our own **ought**, we may feel guilty or that we've let ourselves down.

These mismatches can motivate change—but they can also cause stress. How we handle them depends on our self-awareness, the feedback we receive, and how much influence others have on our self-image.

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.

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.



Figure 3.3.1: Some experts have warned that overpraising children can lead to distorted self-concepts. Rain0975 – participation award – CC BY-ND 2.0.

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. 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).

There are cultural differences in the amount of praise and positive feedback that teachers and parents give their children. 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).

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). 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.

Media

Media often presents an unrealistic ideal of beauty, primarily featuring attractive, thin individuals. This can negatively impact our self-perception, as we compare ourselves to these unattainable standards. For instance, only 12 percent of prime-time characters are overweight, significantly less than the actual U.S. obesity rate. Overweight female characters, in particular, are often subjected to negative comments and jokes, while thinness is praised. While overweight male characters also receive comments about their weight, these are less frequent and less negative.

Beyond physical appearance, media reinforces cultural stereotypes about race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and class. Historically marginalized groups often struggle to find positive portrayals of themselves.

Advertising further exacerbates this by promoting social comparison, suggesting we are inferior without certain products or that we need to change ourselves to fit in. This often plays on fears of aging or unattractiveness, pushing products as solutions to achieve happiness and popularity. It's crucial to critically evaluate these media messages and recognize who is represented and who is excluded.

Self-Presentation

Self-presentation is how we strategically manage the information we share about ourselves to influence how others see us. While we generally aim to be authentic, we do this daily to meet various needs. Misrepresenting ourselves can have severe consequences, as seen with the Yahoo! CEO and MIT dean who lost their jobs for faking credentials. Less severe, but still inauthentic, examples include pretending to know more than you do or using a polished delivery to mask weak content.

Benefits of Skilled Self-Presentation

When done well, self-presentation can help us convey a more positive and accurate picture of ourselves. People skilled at managing impressions often appear more engaging and confident. This involves being a **high self-monitor**, meaning you're aware of your own expressions, others' reactions, and the social context. Some even get professional help, like "Style Me Hired," which offers free makeovers to help job seekers make good first impressions.

Types of Self-Presentation

There are two main types:

- **Prosocial self-presentation:** This involves acting as a role model to be more likable and attractive. For example, a supervisor upholding ethical standards and complimenting others who do the same. These strategies aim to benefit others.
- **Self-serving self-presentation:** This involves presenting oneself as highly skilled or powerful, even if it's not entirely true. An example is a supervisor taking credit for others' work or publicly criticizing an employee. These strategies benefit the individual, often at the expense of others.

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2.4: Improving Perception

Learning Objectives

- Discuss strategies for improving self-perception.
- Discuss strategies for improving perception of others.
- Employ perception checking to improve perception of self and others.

So far, we have learned about the perception process and how we perceive others and ourselves. Our self-perception can be improved by becoming aware of how schema, socializing forces, self-fulfilling prophecies, and negative patterns of thinking can distort our ability to describe and evaluate ourselves. How we perceive others can be improved by developing better listening and empathetic skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, developing self-awareness through self-reflection, and engaging in perception checking.

Improving Self-Perception

Our self-perceptions are constantly evolving. While our overall self-concept and self-esteem remain fairly stable, our context-specific self-perceptions can shift based on who we're interacting with, our emotional state, or the topic at hand. Understanding these nuances is crucial for improving how we see ourselves. Since self-perceptions are highly personal, there's no "right" or "wrong" way to see ourselves. Instead, we can focus on identifying positive and negative aspects, recognizing common barriers to accurate self-perception, and understanding patterns that hinder our ability to monitor and change them. Altering your core self-concept or self-esteem is a significant undertaking, as these are reflections of who we are, built over countless interactions. However, major life events—like transitioning from high school to college, entering a committed relationship, having a child, moving, or starting a new job—can quickly reshape our self-perceptions. Beyond these life-altering experiences, we can also gradually modify our self-perceptions through dedicated efforts, such as enhancing our communication skills through self-monitoring and reflection. As you actively work to change your self-perceptions, be prepared for potential resistance from those close to you. When your self-concept improves, your communication will naturally change, which may prompt others to respond differently. Even with good reasons for these changes, others might feel unsettled or confused by your evolving behaviors and communication, as people generally seek predictability in their relationships.

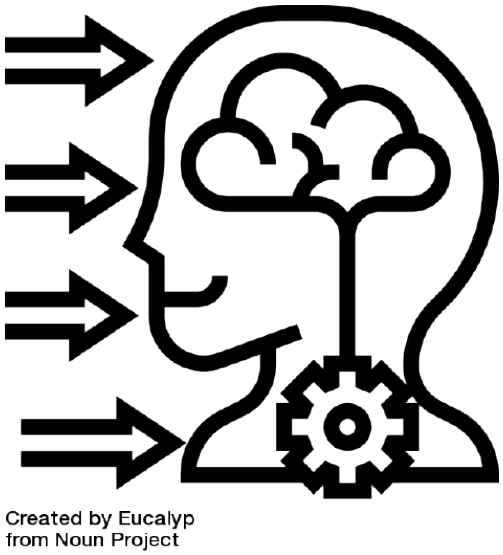


Figure 2.4.1 Improving the perceptual process

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

Our self-perception is shaped by various influences, including family, friends, societal norms, and media. While these forces can be positive, they can also lead to negative self-perceptions.

Media, for example, often promotes unrealistic beauty standards, which can lead to issues like eating disorders, depression, and low self-esteem. In response, movements like fat acceptance have emerged, advocating that health is more important than thinness. The "Healthy at Every Size" movement and the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance challenge the weight-loss industry's negative portrayal of fat. While the link between weight and health is complex, promoting healthy living and self-esteem over extreme dieting seems beneficial given public health concerns about body image.

Cultural influences also impact self-perception, especially for marginalized groups. While discrimination can negatively affect self-esteem, research shows that individuals from minority groups often actively resist internalizing negative societal views. They may even strengthen their identification with their own group as a coping mechanism, finding support and rejecting negative evaluations from outside groups.

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). For example, let's say a student's biology lab instructor is a Chinese person who speaks English as a second language. The student falsely believes that the instructor will not be a good teacher

because he speaks English with an accent. Because of this belief, the student doesn't attend class regularly and doesn't listen actively when she does attend. Because of these behaviors, the student fails the biology lab, which then reinforces her original belief that the instructor wasn't a good teacher.

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. 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 areas such academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinston et al., 2011).



Figure 2.4.2 Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Process

Beware of Distorted Patterns of Thinking and Acting

We all have perceptual biases that can distort our thinking, often without us realizing it. Understanding common negative patterns can help us recognize and address them. People with low self-esteem sometimes overcompensate for their insecurities, perhaps by acquiring material possessions or surrounding themselves with those they deem less successful, seeking a short-term boost. However, such behaviors can lead to financial issues or, by fostering an unrealistic sense of superiority, ultimately worsen self-perception. Another negative cycle involves setting unrealistic goals; consistently failing to meet these can lead to low self-efficacy, damaging self-esteem and self-concept. Goals should be challenging but progressive, building on achievable successes. Furthermore, low self-esteem can arise from a lack of accurate self-information. While some individuals intentionally ignore negative feedback to maintain high self-esteem, this can result in a distorted self-concept. There's a middle ground between self-criticism and ignoring constructive feedback essential for personal growth. Conversely, those with low self-esteem may discount or ignore positive feedback, reinforcing their negative self-perception.

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 a powerful but often overlooked skill. In our fast-paced world, it can feel like a chore, yet it's crucial for understanding others and gaining new information. **Empathetic listening**, in particular, helps us learn from different perspectives and expand our awareness. This kind of listening requires significant cognitive and emotional effort. A key lesson in empathetic listening is to acknowledge that "everyone's biggest problem is their biggest problem." While we might judge someone's concerns as less significant than our own, their reality is still valid to them. Accepting this difference is a major step toward understanding others' perceptions.



Figure 2.4.3 Doctor-Patient Listening

Beware of Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are oversimplified beliefs about groups applied to individuals, ignoring their unique qualities. They can be positive, negative, or neutral, but all can harm communication. Often, they stem from a lack of information. Even "positive" stereotypes, like the "model minority" stereotype for some Asian cultures, can be harmful. While seemingly praising Asian Americans as hardworking and intelligent, this can make individuals feel objectified or overlooked. It can lead individuals to avoid asking for help when they needed it or feel like they've been pushed into careers that don't fit their desires.

Stereotypes can also create double standards, highlighting societal inequalities. For instance, there are more negative terms for sexually active women than for men. To combat stereotypes, we must seek out new information and experiences, basing our impressions on observable behavior rather than assumptions.

When stereotypes lead to negative feelings or attitudes, it becomes **prejudice**. Prejudice can have individual impacts, like a hiring manager illegally discriminating against someone with a disability. It can also become a widespread social injustice if such biased thinking is pervasive. For example, the early response to AIDS was hampered by prejudice, as it was initially seen as a disease affecting only "deviants," delaying crucial attention and resources until it was understood that HIV/AIDS can affect anyone, regardless of race or sexual orientation.

Engage in Self-Reflection

To improve your perceptions and communication, practice self-reflection. This involves understanding your own thoughts and actions when a communication exchange goes awry. Self-reflection also boosts cultural awareness. By learning about other cultures and perspectives, we better understand our own. This often requires stepping outside our comfort zones and listening to those different from us, even if it challenges our deeply held beliefs.

Finally, consider how your self-concept influences your perception of others. We often project our own standards onto them. Ask yourself, "Is my impression based on how this person *wants* to be, or how I think they *should* be?" Such questions are crucial for perception checking.

Checking Perception

Perception checking helps us understand our reactions to people and communication. This involves both internal and external strategies. Internally, ask yourself, "What's influencing my current perceptions?" This simple awareness boosts your understanding of the perception process.

Externally, you can verify your perceptions with others, especially in important situations. However, not all situations allow this, and there's a fine line between being overly cautious and being too reactive. For instance, sometimes preventable crimes occur because people had a "bad feeling" but didn't report it. While some situations clearly require reporting harm, others are far more ambiguous.

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3: VERBAL COMMUNICATION

3.1: Language and Meaning
3.2: Functions of Language
3.3: Using Words Well
3.4: Language, Society, and Culture

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3.1: Language and Meaning

Learning Objectives

- Use the triangle of meaning to help understand the symbolic nature of language.
- Distinguish between denotation and connotation.
- Discuss the function of the rules of language.
- Briefly describe the process of language acquisition.

The relationship between language and meaning is not a straightforward one. One reason for this complicated relationship is the limitlessness of modern language systems like English (Crystal, 2005). So with all this possibility, how does communication generate meaning?

You'll recall that "generating meaning" was a central part of the definition of communication we learned earlier. It is here, between what the communication models we discussed earlier labeled as encoding and decoding, that meaning is generated as sensory information is interpreted. The indirect and sometimes complicated relationship between language and meaning can lead to confusion, frustration, or even humor. We may even experience a little of all three, when we stop to think about how there are some twenty-five definitions available to tell us the meaning of word *meaning*! (Crystal, 2005) Since language and symbols are the primary vehicle for our communication, it is important that we not take the components of our verbal communication for granted.

Language Is Symbolic

Our language system is primarily made up of symbols. A symbol is something that stands in for or represents something else. Symbols can be communicated verbally (speaking the word *hello*), in writing (putting the letters *H-E-L-L-O* together), or nonverbally (waving your hand back and forth). In any case, the symbols we use stand in for something else, like a physical object or an idea; they do not actually correspond to the thing being referenced in any direct way. The symbols used in modern languages look nothing like the object or idea to which they refer.

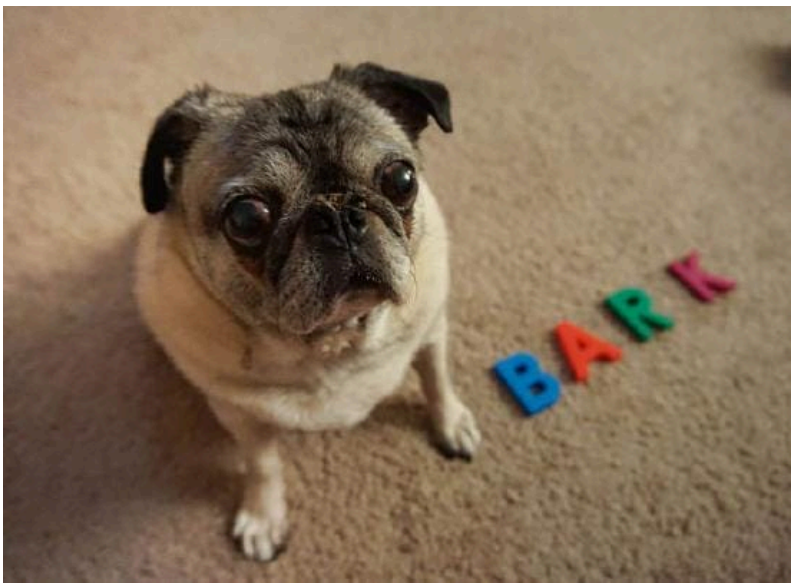


Figure 3.1.1: Although animals do communicate in some ways, humans' ability to use symbols to communicate about things outside of our immediate surroundings and experience is unique. Joshua Allen – Bark – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The earliest human verbal communication was not very symbolic or abstract, as it likely mimicked sounds of animals and nature. Such a simple form of communication persisted for thousands of years, but as later humans turned to settled agriculture and populations grew, things needed to be more distinguishable. More terms (symbols) were needed to accommodate the increasing

number of things like tools and ideas like crop rotation that emerged as a result of new knowledge about and experience with farming and animal domestication. There weren't written symbols during this time, but objects were often used to represent other objects; for example, a farmer might have kept a pebble in a box to represent each chicken he owned. Despite the fact that these transitions occurred many thousands of years ago, we can trace some words that we still use today back to their much more direct and much less abstract origins.

The Triangle of Meaning

The triangle of meaning is a model of communication that indicates the relationship among a thought, symbol, and referent and highlights the indirect relationship between the symbol and referent (Richards & Ogden, 1923). As you can see in Figure 3.2 "Triangle of Meaning", the thought is the concept or idea a person references. The symbol is the word that represents the thought, and the referent is the object or idea to which the symbol refers. This model is useful for us as communicators because when we are aware of the indirect relationship between symbols and referents, we are aware of how common misunderstandings occur, as the following example illustrates: Juan and Antonia have been thinking about getting a new dog. So each of them is having a similar thought. They are each using the same symbol, the word *dog*, to communicate about their thought. Their referents, however, are different. Juan is thinking about a small dog like a dachshund, and Antonia is thinking about an Australian shepherd. Since the word *dog* doesn't refer to one specific object in our reality, it is possible for them to have the same thought, and use the same symbol, but end up in an awkward moment when they get to the shelter and fall in love with their respective referents only to find out the other person didn't have the same thing in mind.

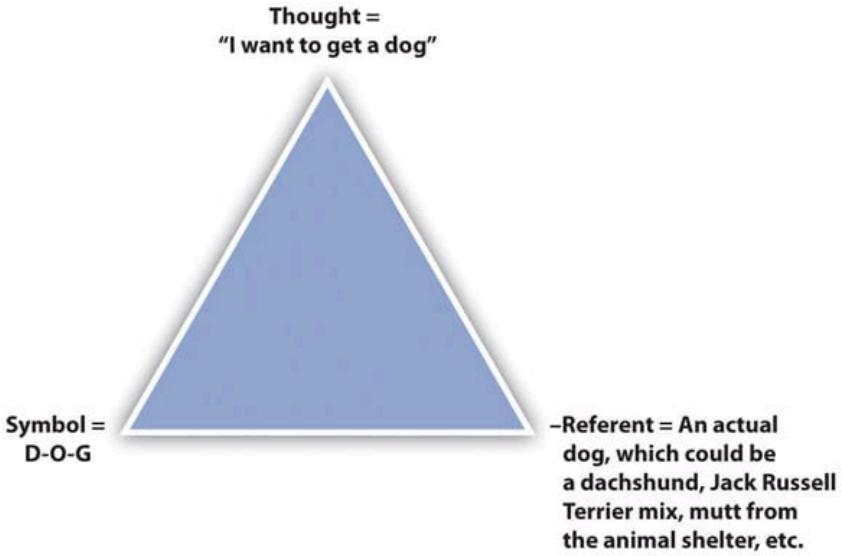


Figure 3.1.2: Triangle of Meaning. Source: Adapted from Ivor A. Richards and Charles K. Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Tubner, 1923). (CC BY-SA-NC 3.0; anonymous)

Being aware of this indirect relationship between symbol and referent, we can try to compensate for it by getting clarification. Some of what we learned in Chapter 2 about perception checking, can be useful here. Antonia might ask Juan "What kind of dog do you have in mind?" This question would allow Juan to describe his referent, which would allow for more shared understanding. If Juan responds, "Well, I like short-haired dogs. And we need a dog that will work well in an apartment," then there's still quite a range of referents. Antonia could ask questions for clarification, like "Sounds like you're saying that a smaller dog might be better. Is that right?" Getting to a place of shared understanding can be difficult, even when we define our symbols and describe our referents.

Definitions

Definitions help us narrow the meaning of particular symbols, which also narrows a symbol's possible referents. They also provide more words (symbols) for which we must determine a referent.

Words have **denotative** and **connotative** meanings. **Denotation** refers to definitions that are accepted by the language group as a whole, or the dictionary definition of a word. For example, the denotation of the word *cowboy* is a man who takes care of

cattle. Another denotation is a reckless and/or independent person. A more abstract word, like *change*, would be more difficult to understand due to the multiple denotations. Since both *cowboy* and *change* have multiple meanings, they are considered polysemic words. Monosemic words have only one use in a language, which makes their denotation more straightforward.

Connotation refers to definitions that are based on emotion- or experience-based associations people have with a word. To go back to our previous words, *change* can have positive or negative connotations depending on a person's experiences. A person who just ended a long-term relationship may think of change as good or bad depending on what he or she thought about his or her former partner. Even monosemic words like *handkerchief* that only have one denotation can have multiple connotations. A handkerchief can conjure up thoughts of dainty Southern belles or disgusting snot-rags. A polysemic word like *cowboy* has many connotations, and philosophers of language have explored how connotations extend beyond one or two experiential or emotional meanings of a word to constitute cultural myths (Barthes, 1972).*Cowboy*, for example, connects to the frontier and the western history of the United States, which has mythologies associated with it that help shape the narrative of the nation. The Marlboro Man was an enduring advertising icon that drew on connotations of the cowboy to attract customers. While people who grew up with cattle or have family that ranch may have a very specific connotation of the word *cowboy* based on personal experience, other people's connotations may be more influenced by popular cultural symbolism like that seen in westerns.

Language Is Learned

As we just learned, the relationship between the symbols that make up our language and their referents is arbitrary, which means they have no meaning until we assign it to them. In order to effectively use a language system, we have to learn, over time, which symbols go with which referents, since we can't just tell by looking at the symbol. For speakers of English, they probably learned what the word *apple* meant by looking at the letters *A-P-P-L-E* and a picture of an apple and having a teacher or caregiver help you sound out the letters until you said the whole word. Over time, we associated that combination of letters with the picture of an apple and no longer had to sound each letter out. This is a deliberate process that may seem slow in the moment, but as we will see next, our ability to acquire language is actually quite astounding. We didn't just learn individual words and their meanings, though; we also learned rules of grammar that help us put those words into meaningful sentences.

The Rules of Language

Any language system has to have rules to make it learnable and usable. Grammar refers to the rules that govern how words are used to make phrases and sentences. Someone would likely know what you mean by the question "Where's the remote control?" But "The control remote where's?" is likely to be unintelligible or at least confusing (Crystal, 2005). Knowing the rules of grammar is important in order to be able to write and speak to be understood, but knowing these rules isn't enough to make you an effective communicator. As we will learn later, creativity and play also have a role in effective verbal communication. Even though teachers have long enforced the idea that there are right and wrong ways to write and say words, there really isn't anything inherently right or wrong about the individual choices we make in our language use. Rather, it is our collective agreement that gives power to the rules that govern language.

Looking back to our discussion of connotation, we can see how individuals play a role in how meaning and language are related, since we each bring our own emotional and experiential associations with a word that are often more meaningful than a dictionary definition. In addition, we have quite a bit of room for creativity, play, and resistance with the symbols we use. Have you ever had a secret code with a friend that only you knew? This can allow you to use a code word in a public place to get meaning across to the other person who is "in the know" without anyone else understanding the message. The fact that you can take a word, give it another meaning, have someone else agree on that meaning, and then use the word in your own fashion clearly shows that meaning is in people rather than words. As we will learn later, many slang words developed because people wanted a covert way to talk about certain topics like drugs or sex without outsiders catching on.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition refers to the process by which we learn to understand, produce, and use words to communicate within a given language group. The way we acquire language is affected by many factors. We know that learning a language is not just about learning words. We have to learn how to correctly connect the words to what they mean in a given context and be able to order the words in such a way, within the rules of grammar for the language code we are using, that other people will be able to understand us (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). As if that didn't seem like enough to learn, we also have to learn various conversational patterns that we regularly but often unconsciously follow to make our interactions smooth and successful. A brief overview of language acquisition from birth to adulthood offers us a look at the amazing and still somewhat mysterious

relationships between our brain, eyes, ears, voice, and other physiological elements (Crystal, 2005). In terms of language acquisition, there is actually a great deal of variation between individuals due to physical and contextual differences, but this overview presumes “typical development.”

Much is being taken in during the first year of life as brain development accelerates and senses are focused and tuned. Primary caregivers are driven, almost instinctively, to begin instilling conversational abilities in babies from birth. As just about anyone who has spent time around a baby during this phase of rapid development can attest, there is a compulsion to interact with the child, which is usually entertaining for adult and baby. This compulsion isn’t random or accidental, and we would be wrong to assume that our communication is useless or just for fun. We would also be wrong to assume that language acquisition doesn’t begin until a baby says his or her first words. By the time this happens, babies have learned much, through observation and practice, about our verbal communication and interaction patterns.

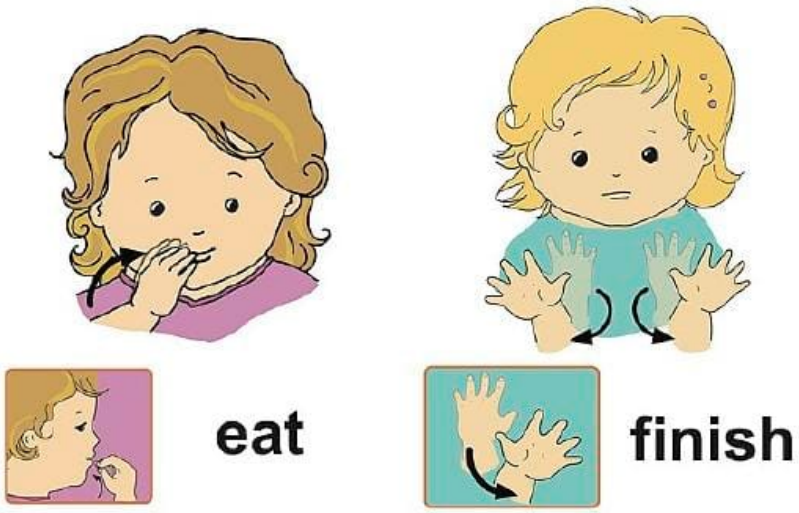


Figure 3.1.2 Children Signing

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3.2: Functions of Language

Learning Objectives

- Identify the main types of linguistic expressions.
- Discuss the power of language to express our identities, affect our credibility, control others, and perform actions.
- Discuss some of the sources of fun within language.
- Consider how neologisms and slang contribute to the dynamic nature of language.
- Think about ways language can bring us together or separate us.

In this section, we will learn about the five functions of language, which show us that language is expressive, language is powerful, language is fun, language is dynamic, and language is relational.

Language Is Expressive

Verbal communication helps us meet various needs through our ability to express ourselves. In terms of instrumental needs, we use verbal communication to ask questions that provide us with specific information. We also use verbal communication to describe things, people, and ideas. Verbal communication helps us inform, persuade, and entertain others, which as we will learn later are the three general purposes of public speaking. It is also through our verbal expressions that our personal relationships are formed. At its essence, language is expressive. Verbal expressions help us communicate our observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

Expressing Observations

When we express observations, we report on the sensory information we are taking or have taken in. Eyewitness testimony is a good example of communicating observations. Witnesses are not supposed to make judgments or offer conclusions; they only communicate factual knowledge as they experienced it. For example, a witness could say, “I saw a white Mitsubishi Eclipse leaving my neighbor’s house at 10:30 pm.” When you are trying to make sense of an experience, expressing observations in a descriptive rather than evaluative way can lessen defensiveness, which facilitates competent communication.

Expressing Thoughts

When we express thoughts, we draw conclusions based on what we have experienced. In the perception process, this is similar to the interpretation step. We take various observations and evaluate and interpret them to assign them meaning (a conclusion). Whereas our observations are based on sensory information (what we saw, what we read, what we heard), thoughts are connected to our beliefs (what we think is true/false), attitudes (what we like and dislike), and values (what we think is right/wrong or good/bad). Jury members are expected to express thoughts based on reported observations to help reach a conclusion about someone’s guilt or innocence. A juror might express the following thought: “The neighbor who saw the car leaving the night of the crime seemed credible. And the defendant seemed to have a shady past—I think she’s trying to hide something.” Sometimes people intentionally or unintentionally express thoughts as if they were feelings. For example, when people say, “I feel like you’re too strict with your attendance policy,” they aren’t really expressing a feeling; they are expressing a judgment about the other person (a thought).

Expressing Feelings



Figure 3.2.1: Expressing feelings is often the most difficult form of verbal expression. Lucas – emotion icon – CC BY-NC 2.0.

When we express feelings, we share our emotions. This can be difficult because social norms—shaped by culture, age, and gender—tell us when and how it is acceptable to show emotions. For example, children are often more open with their feelings, while boys may be encouraged to restrain them as they grow older. In many cultures, women are expected to be more emotionally expressive than men.

Sharing emotions can also be uncomfortable for listeners. Some people struggle with processing others' feelings, and emotions like anger can be especially hard to manage. Still, expressing feelings is important for building relationships and showing empathy. Developing a strong emotional vocabulary helps us be clearer and more specific—for instance, distinguishing between being happy, delighted, or ecstatic. Today, much emotional communication happens through text, email, or emojis. Written messages allow us to take time to express ourselves but can lack tone and nonverbal cues. Delayed responses may also create frustration, especially when we seek support or validation.

Expressing Needs

When we express needs, we are communicating in an instrumental way to help us get things done. Since we almost always know our needs more than others do, it's important for us to be able to convey those needs to others. Expressing needs can help us get a project done at work or help us navigate the changes of a long-term romantic partnership. Not expressing needs can lead to feelings of abandonment, frustration, or resentment. For example, if one romantic partner expresses the following thought "I think we're moving too quickly in our relationship" but doesn't also express a need, the other person in the relationship doesn't have a guide for what to do in response to the expressed thought. Stating, "I need to spend some time with my friends this weekend. Would you mind if I went to meet them by myself?" would likely make the expression more effective. Be cautious of letting evaluations or judgments sneak into your expressions of need. Saying "I need you to stop suffocating me!" really expresses a thought-feeling mixture more than a need.

Language Is Powerful

The contemporary American philosopher David Abram wrote, "Only if words are felt, bodily presences, like echoes or waterfalls, can we understand the power of spoken language to influence, alter, and transform the perceptual world" (Abram, 1997). This statement encapsulates many of the powerful features of language. Next, we will discuss how language expresses our identities, affects our credibility, serves as a means of control, and performs actions.

Language Expresses Our Identities

In the opening to this chapter, I recounted how an undergraduate class in semantics solidified my love of language. I could have

continued on to say that I have come to think of myself as a "word nerd." Words or phrases like that express who we are and contribute to the impressions that others make of us. We've already learned about identity needs and impression management and how we all use verbal communication strategically to create a desired impression. But how might the label *word nerd* affect me differently if someone else placed it on me?

The power of language to express our identities varies depending on the origin of the label (self-chosen or other imposed) and the context. People are usually comfortable with the language they use to describe their own identities but may have issues with the labels others place on them. In terms of context, many people express their "Irish" identity on St. Patrick's Day, but they may not think much about it over the rest of the year. There are many examples of people who have taken a label that was imposed on them, one that usually has negative connotations, and intentionally used it in ways that counter previous meanings. Some country music singers and comedians have reclaimed the label *redneck*, using it as an identity marker they are proud of rather than a pejorative term. Other examples of people reclaiming identity labels is the "black is beautiful" movement of the 1960s that repositioned *black* as a positive identity marker for African Americans and the "queer" movement of the 1980s and '90s that reclaimed *queer* as a positive identity marker for some gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Even though some people embrace reclaimed words, they can still carry their negative connotations and might not be openly accepted by everyone.

Language Affects Our Credibility

One of the goals of this chapter is to help you be more competent with your verbal communication. People make assumptions about your credibility based on how you speak and what you say. Even though we've learned that meaning is in people rather than words and that the rules that govern verbal communication, like rules of grammar, are arbitrary, these norms still mean something. You don't have to be a perfect grammarian to be perceived as credible. In fact, if you followed the grammar rules for written communication to the letter you would actually sound pretty strange, since our typical way of speaking isn't as formal and structured as writing. But you still have to support your ideas and explain the conclusions you make to be seen as competent. You have to use language clearly and be accountable for what you say in order to be seen as trustworthy. Using informal language and breaking social norms we've discussed so far wouldn't enhance your credibility during a professional job interview, but it might with your friends at a tailgate party. Politicians know that the way they speak affects their credibility, but they also know that using words that are too scientific or academic can lead people to perceive them as "eggheads,"

which would hurt their credibility. Politicians and many others in leadership positions need to be able to use language to put people at ease, relate to others, and still appear confident and competent.

Language Is a Means of Control

Control is a word that has negative connotations, but our use of it here can be positive, neutral, or negative. Verbal communication can be used to reward and punish. We can offer verbal communication in the form of positive reinforcement to praise someone. We can withhold verbal communication or use it in a critical, aggressive, or hurtful way as a form of negative reinforcement.

Directives are utterances that try to get another person to do something. They can range from a rather polite ask or request to a more forceful *command* or *insist*. Context informs when and how we express directives and how people respond to them. Promises are often paired with directives in order to persuade people to comply, and those promises, whether implied or stated, should be kept in order to be an ethical communicator. Keep this in mind to avoid arousing false expectations on the part of the other person (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990).

Rather than verbal communication being directed at one person as a means of control, the way we talk creates overall climates of communication that may control many. Verbal communication characterized by empathy, understanding, respect, and honesty creates open climates that lead to more collaboration and more information exchange. Verbal communication that is controlling, deceitful, and vague creates a closed climate in which people are less willing to communicate and less trusting (Brown, 2006).

Language Is Performative

Some language is actually more like an action than a packet of information. Saying, "I promise," "I guarantee," or "I pledge," does more than convey meaning; it communicates intent. Such utterances are called commissives, as they mean a speaker is committed to a certain course of action (Crystal, 2005). Of course, promises can be broken, and there can be consequences, but other verbal communication is granted official power that can guarantee action. The two simple words *I do* can mean that a person has agreed to an oath before taking a witness stand or assuming the presidency. It can also mean that two people are

now bound in a relationship recognized by the government and/or a religious community. These two words, if said in the right context and in front of the right person, such as a judge or a reverend, bring with them obligations that cannot be undone without additional steps and potential negative repercussions. In that sense, language is much more than “mere words.”



Figure 3.2.2: Judges’ words perform actions ranging from holding someone in contempt of court to sentencing someone to death. Brian Turner – My Trust Gavel – CC BY 2.0.

Performative language can also be a means of control, especially in legal contexts. In some cases, the language that makes our laws is intentionally vague. In courts all over the nation, the written language intersects with spoken language as lawyers advocate for particular interpretations of the written law. The utterances of judges and juries set precedents for interpretations that will then help decide future cases. Imagine how powerful the words *We the jury find the defendant…* seem to the defendant awaiting his or her verdict. The sentences handed down by judges following a verdict are also performative because those words impose fines, penalties, or worse. Some language is deemed so powerful that it is regulated. Hate speech, which we will learn more about later, and slander, libel, and defamation are considered powerful enough to actually do damage to a person and have therefore been criminalized.

Language Is Fun

Word games have long been popular. Before Words with Friends there was Apples to Apples, Boggle, Scrabble, and crossword puzzles. Writers, poets, and comedians have built careers on their ability to have fun with language and in turn share that fun with others. The fun and frivolity of language becomes clear as teachers get half-hearted laughs from students when they make puns.

There are more than one hundred theories of humor, but none of them quite captures the complex and often contradictory nature of what we find funny (Foot & McCreaddie, 2006). Humor is a complicated social phenomenon that is largely based on the relationship between language and meaning. Humor functions to liven up conversations, break the ice, and increase group cohesion. We also use humor to test our compatibility with others when a deep conversation about certain topics like politics or religion would be awkward. Bringing up these topics in a lighthearted way can give us indirect information about another person’s beliefs, attitudes, and values. Based on their response to the humorous message, we can either probe further or change the subject and write it off as a poor attempt at humor (Foot & McCreaddie, 2006). Using humor also draws attention to us, and the reactions that we get from others feeds into our self-concept. We also use humor to disclose information about ourselves that we might not feel comfortable revealing in a more straightforward way. Humor can also be used to express sexual interest or to cope with bad news or bad situations.

Language Is Dynamic

As we already learned, language is essentially limitless. We may create a one-of-a-kind sentence combining words in new ways and never know it. Aside from the endless structural possibilities, words change meaning, and new words are created daily. In this section, we’ll learn more about the dynamic nature of language by focusing on neologisms and slang. There is the distinct

possibility that the examples given here may have become less relevant, which in itself is an example of how dynamic language is!

Neologisms

Neologisms are newly coined or used words. Newly coined words are those that were just brought into linguistic existence. Newly used words make their way into languages in several ways, including borrowing and changing structure. *Taking* is actually a more fitting descriptor than *borrowing*, since we take words but don't really give them back. In any case, borrowing is the primary means through which languages expand. English is a good case in point, as most of its vocabulary is borrowed and doesn't reflect the language's Germanic origins. English has been called the "vacuum cleaner of languages" (Crystal, 2005).*Weekend* is a popular English word based on the number of languages that have borrowed it. We have borrowed many words, like *chic* from French, *karaoke* from Japanese, and *caravan* from Arabic.

Structural changes also lead to new words. Compound words are neologisms that are created by joining two already known words. *Keyboard*, *newspaper*, and *gift card* are all compound words that were formed when new things were created or conceived. We also create new words by adding something, subtracting something, or blending them together. For example, we can add affixes, meaning a prefix or a suffix, to a word. Affixing usually alters the original meaning but doesn't completely change it. *Ex-husband* and *kitchenette* are relatively recent examples of such changes (Crystal, 2005). New words are also formed when clipping a word like *examination*, which creates a new word, *exam*, that retains the same meaning. And last, we can form new words by blending old ones together. Words like *breakfast* and *lunch* blend letters and meaning to form a new word—*brunch*.

Existing words also change in their use and meaning. The digital age has given rise to some interesting changes in word usage. Before Facebook, the word *friend* had many meanings, but it was mostly used as a noun referring to a companion. The sentence, *I'll friend you*, wouldn't have made sense to many people just a few years ago because *friend* wasn't used as a verb. *Google* went from being a proper noun referring to the company to a more general verb that refers to searching for something on the Internet (perhaps not even using the Google search engine). Meanings can expand or contract without changing from a noun to a verb. *Gay*, an adjective for feeling happy, expanded to include *gay* as an adjective describing a person's sexual orientation. Perhaps because of the confusion that this caused, the meaning of *gay* has contracted again, as the earlier meaning is now considered archaic, meaning it is no longer in common usage.

Slang

Slang is a great example of the dynamic nature of language. Slang refers to new or adapted words that are specific to a group, context, and/or time period; regarded as less formal; and representative of people's creative play with language. Research has shown that only about 10 percent of the slang terms that emerge over a fifteen-year period survive. Many more take their place though, as new slang words are created using inversion, reduction, or old-fashioned creativity (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Inversion is a form of word play that produces slang words like *sick*, *wicked*, and *bad* that refer to the opposite of their typical meaning. Reduction creates slang words such as *pic*, *sec*, and *later* from *picture*, *second*, and *see you later*. New slang words often represent what is edgy, current, or simply relevant to the daily lives of a group of people. Many creative examples of slang refer to illegal or socially taboo topics like sex, drinking, and drugs. It makes sense that developing an alternative way to identify drugs or talk about taboo topics could make life easier for the people who partake in such activities. Slang allows people who are in "in the know" to break the code and presents a linguistic barrier for unwanted outsiders. Taking a moment to think about the amount of slang that refers to being intoxicated on drugs or alcohol or engaging in sexual activity should generate a lengthy list.

It's often difficult for individuals to identify the slang they use at any given moment because it is worked into our everyday language patterns and becomes very natural. Just as we learned here, new words can create a lot of buzz and become a part of common usage very quickly. The same can happen with new slang terms. Most slang words also disappear quickly, and their alternative meaning fades into obscurity. For example, you don't hear anyone using the word *macaroni* to refer to something cool or fashionable. But that's exactly what the common slang meaning of the word was at the time the song "Yankee Doodle" was written. Yankee Doodle isn't saying the feather he sticks in his cap is a small, curved pasta shell; he is saying it's cool or stylish.

Language Is Relational

We use verbal communication to initiate, maintain, and terminate our interpersonal relationships. The first few exchanges with a potential romantic partner or friend help us size the other person up and figure out if we want to pursue a relationship or not. We then use verbal communication to remind others how we feel about them and to check in with them—engaging in relationship maintenance through language use. When negative feelings arrive and persist, or for many other reasons, we often use verbal

communication to end a relationship.

Language Can Bring Us Together

Interpersonally, verbal communication is key to bringing people together and maintaining relationships. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, our use of words like *I*, *you*, *we*, *our*, and *us* affect our relationships. “We language” includes the words *we*, *our*, and *us* and can be used to promote a feeling of inclusiveness. Example: "I appreciate it that we enjoy the same type of films." “I language” can be useful when expressing thoughts, needs, and feelings because it leads us to “own” our expressions and avoid the tendency to mistakenly attribute the cause of our thoughts, needs, and feelings to others. Communicating emotions using “I language” may also facilitate emotion sharing by not making our conversational partner feel at fault or defensive. For example, instead of saying, “You’re making me crazy!” you could say, “I’m starting to feel really anxious because we can’t make a decision about this.” Conversely, “you language” can lead people to become defensive and feel attacked, which could be divisive and result in feelings of interpersonal separation.



Figure 3.2.3: Verbal communication brings people together and helps maintain satisfying relationships. Matus Laslofi – Talk – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Aside from the specific words that we use, the frequency of communication impacts relationships. Of course, the content of what is said is important, but research shows that romantic partners who communicate frequently with each other and with mutual friends and family members experience less stress and uncertainty in their relationship and are more likely to stay together (McCornack, 2007). When frequent communication combines with supportive messages, which are messages communicated in an open, honest, and nonconfrontational way, people are more likely to come together.

Moving from the interpersonal to the sociocultural level, we can see that speaking the same language can bring people together. When a person is surrounded by people who do not speak his or her native language, it can be very comforting to run into another person who speaks the same language. Even if the two people are strangers, the ease of linguistic compatibility is comforting and can quickly facilitate a social bond.

Language Can Separate Us

Whether it’s criticism, teasing, or language differences, verbal communication can also lead to feelings of separation. People who speak the same language can intentionally use language to separate. The words *us* and *them* can be a powerful start to separation. Think of how language played a role in segregation in the United States as the notion of “separate but equal” was upheld by the Supreme Court and how apartheid affected South Africa as limits, based on finances and education, were placed on the black majority’s rights to vote. Symbols, both words and images, were a very important part of Hitler’s rise to power in the 1930s and ’40s in Europe. Various combinations of colored stars, triangles, letters, and other symbols were sewn onto the clothing or uniforms of people persecuted by the Nazis in order to classify them. People were labeled and reduced to certain characteristics rather than seen as complete humans, which facilitated the Nazis’ oppression, violence, and killing (Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center, 2012).

At the interpersonal level, unsupportive messages can make others respond defensively, which can lead to feelings of separation and actual separation or dissolution of a relationship. It's impossible to be supportive in our communication all the time, but consistently unsupportive messages can hurt others' self-esteem, escalate conflict, and lead to defensiveness. People who regularly use unsupportive messages may create a toxic win/lose climate in a relationship. Six verbal tactics that can lead to feelings of defensiveness and separation are global labels, sarcasm, dragging up the past, negative comparisons, judgmental "you" messages, and threats (McKay, Davis & Fanning, 1995).

Common Types of Unsupportive Messages

1. **Global labels.** "You're a liar." Labeling someone irresponsible, untrustworthy, selfish, or lazy calls his or her whole identity as a person into question. Such sweeping judgments and generalizations are sure to only escalate a negative situation.
2. **Sarcasm.** "No, you didn't miss anything in class on Wednesday. We just sat here and looked at each other." Even though sarcasm is often disguised as humor, it usually represents passive-aggressive behavior through which a person indirectly communicates negative feelings.
3. **Dragging up the past.** "I should have known not to trust you when you never paid me back that $100 I let you borrow." Bringing up negative past experiences is a tactic used by people when they don't want to discuss a current situation. Sometimes people have built up negative feelings that are suddenly let out by a seemingly small thing in the moment.
4. **Negative comparisons.** "Jade graduated from college without any credit card debt. I guess you're just not as responsible as she is." Holding a person up to the supposed standards or characteristics of another person can lead to feelings of inferiority and resentment. Parents and teachers may unfairly compare children to their siblings.
5. **Judgmental "you" messages.** "You're never going to be able to hold down a job." Accusatory messages are usually generalized overstatements about another person that go beyond labeling but still do not describe specific behavior in a productive way.
6. **Threats.** "If you don't stop texting back and forth with your ex, both of you are going to regret it." Threatening someone with violence or some other negative consequence usually signals the end of productive communication. Aside from the potential legal consequences, threats usually overcompensate for a person's insecurity.

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3.3: Using Words Well

Learning Objectives

- Discuss how the process of abstraction and the creation of messages relate to language clarity.
- Employ figurative and evocative language.
- Identify strategies for using language ethically.

Have you ever gotten lost because someone gave you directions that didn't make sense to you? Have you ever puzzled over the instructions for how to put something like a bookshelf or grill together? When people don't use words well, there are consequences that range from mild annoyance to legal actions. When people do use words well, they can be inspiring and make us better people. In this section, we will learn how to use words well by using words clearly, using words affectively, and using words ethically.

Using Words Clearly

The level of clarity with which we speak varies depending on whom we talk to, the situation we're in, and our own intentions and motives. We sometimes make a deliberate effort to speak as clearly as possible. We can indicate this concern for clarity nonverbally by slowing our rate and increasing our volume or verbally by saying, "Frankly…" or "Let me be clear…" Sometimes it can be difficult to speak clearly—for example, when we are speaking about something with which we are unfamiliar. Emotions and distractions can also interfere with our clarity. Being aware of the varying levels of abstraction within language can help us create clearer and more "whole" messages.

Level of Abstraction

The ladder of abstraction is a model used to illustrate how language can range from concrete to abstract. As we follow a concept up the ladder of abstraction, more and more of the "essence" of the original object is lost or left out, which leaves more room for interpretation, which can lead to misunderstanding. This process of abstracting, of leaving things out, allows us to communicate more effectively because it serves as a shorthand that keeps us from having a completely unmanageable language filled with millions of words—each referring to one specific thing (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). But it requires us to use context and often other words to generate shared meaning. Some words are more directly related to a concept or idea than others. If I asked you to go take a picture of a book, you could do that. If I asked you to go and take a picture of "work," you couldn't because *work* is an abstract word that was developed to refer to any number of possibilities from the act of writing a book, to repairing an air conditioner, to fertilizing an organic garden. You could take a picture of any of those things, but you can't take a picture of "work."

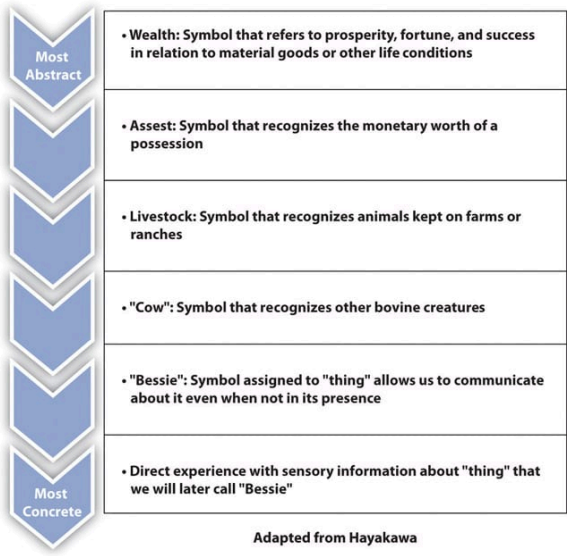


Figure 3.3.1: Ladder of Abstraction: Source: Adapted from S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 85.

Language can be more or less concrete, which affects how easily we are understood. Hayakawa's "ladder of abstraction" shows this: at the bottom, we have concrete terms (e.g., *Bessie the cow*), while at the top, we have abstract ones (e.g., *animal* or *book*). As we move up the ladder, words become vaguer and less tied to real experiences. Because of this, we should use more concrete language when clarity is especially important—like giving directions or explaining a new idea. Abstract language can be useful too, especially when we want to soften criticism, test out an idea, or avoid details.

Definitions help, but they also rely on other words, which can send us up the abstraction ladder. People understand best when we move down the ladder—linking terms to personal experiences or vivid examples. Saying "blue is the color of the sky on a clear day" is more helpful than saying "blue is a color." Similarly, jargon should be avoided or explained, since specialized terms can alienate people outside a group.

Whole and Clear Messages

Good communication depends not only on word choice but also on message completeness. Whole messages include four parts: observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs. Leaving parts out (partial messages) or mixing them together (contaminated messages) often causes confusion and conflict. For example, instead of saying, "I don't trust Bob anymore," which only shares a thought, a clearer version would also explain what happened (observation), how it made you feel, and what you need from the listener. Complete messages reduce misunderstandings and strengthen relationships.

Affective and Figurative Language

Language also carries emotion. Affective language—"speaking from the heart"—helps people connect by sharing feelings directly. Figurative language, like similes ("life is like a box of chocolates") and metaphors ("time is money"), enriches meaning and can shape how we see the world. Personification, giving human qualities to nonhuman things, can also make abstract issues feel more urgent or real.

Evocative and Euphemistic Language

Vivid, evocative words engage the senses and stir emotion. They can calm, motivate, or inspire people to act, which is why they are powerful in both conversations and public speaking. However, some words are so strong they may shock or offend. Euphemisms—indirect or gentler terms (like "passed away" instead of "died")—help us discuss sensitive topics, but overusing them can reduce clarity.

Using Words Ethically

We learned in Chapter 1 that communication is irreversible. We also learned that, among other things, the National Communication Association's "Credo for Ethical Communication" states that we should be accountable for the long- and short-term effects of our communication (National Communication Association, 2012). The way we talk, the words we choose to use, and the actions we take after we are done speaking are all important aspects of communication ethics. Earlier we learned that language is performative, meaning that it can exceed the exchange of information and actually perform certain actions. Knowing that language can have real effects for people increases our need to be aware of the ethical implications of what we say. In this section, we will focus on civility and accountability.

Civility in Communication

Strong emotions tied to our beliefs and values can sometimes lead to **incivility**—behavior that goes against social norms. Incivility can include insults, bragging, bullying, gossip, swearing, deception, or defensiveness. While many worry that civility is declining, standards for what counts as "civil" have always shifted with culture and time. In diverse societies, people often express their identities more openly, which can be seen as either healthy individuality or a lack of restraint.

Online spaces also raise new questions about civility. Comment sections, blogs, and social media can encourage name-calling, personal attacks, and obscenity. Some see this as harmful to democracy, while others argue it allows marginalized voices to be heard.

What leads to incivility?

- **Individual differences** – Some personalities are more prone to uncivil behavior.
- **Ignorance** – People may not know the norms in unfamiliar situations.
- **Lack of skill** – In conflict, some resort to attacks because they don't know better strategies.
- **Loss of control** – Even skilled communicators can "slip up."
- **Negative intent** – Some deliberately break norms to rebel, hurt others, or gain attention.

Polarizing Language

When stressed or threatened, people often use **polarizing language**, which presents issues as "all or nothing." Statements like "All cops are corrupt" or "All drug users are scum" oversimplify reality and shut down dialogue. Avoiding such extremes helps keep discussions civil, open-minded, and more productive.

Swearing

Swearing serves different functions.

- **Social swearing** builds bonds or manages impressions (e.g., sounding "cool").
- **Annoyance swearing** helps release frustration and manage stress, sometimes preventing aggression.

Swearing is shaped by context and social expectations—for instance, women are often judged more harshly for swearing than men.

Accountability

Clear communication requires distinguishing between **facts**, **inferences**, and **judgments**:

- **Facts** – based on direct observation (“I worked three days on my paper and got a C”).
- **Inferences** – conclusions drawn from limited evidence (“The professor plays favorites”).
- **Judgments** – personal opinions or evaluations (“The professor is unfair”).

Confusing these categories leads to misunderstandings. Ethical speakers clarify their statements, use descriptive language, and own their feelings with “I” language. This accountability makes communication clearer, fairer, and more trustworthy.

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3.4: Language, Society, and Culture

Learning Objectives

- Discuss some of the social norms that guide conversational interaction.
- Identify some of the ways in which language varies based on cultural context.
- Explain the role that accommodation and code-switching play in communication.
- Discuss cultural bias in relation to specific cultural identities.

Society and culture influence the words that we speak, and the words that we speak influence society and culture. Such a cyclical relationship can be difficult to understand, but many of the examples throughout this chapter and examples from our own lives help illustrate this point. One of the best ways to learn about society, culture, and language is to seek out opportunities to go beyond our typical comfort zones. Relating to others from other cultures and studying abroad, for example, bring many challenges that can turn into valuable lessons.

Language and Social Context

We arrive at meaning through conversational interaction, which follows many social norms and rules. As we've already learned, rules are explicitly stated conventions ("Look at me when I'm talking to you.") and norms are implicit (saying you've got to leave before you actually do to politely initiate the end to a conversation). To help conversations function meaningfully, we have learned social norms and internalized them to such an extent that we do not often consciously enact them. Instead, we rely on routines and roles (as determined by social forces) to help us proceed with verbal interaction, which also helps determine how a conversation will unfold. Our various social roles influence meaning and how we speak. For example, a person may say, "As a longtime member of this community..." or "As a first-generation college student..." Such statements cue others into the personal and social context from which we are speaking, which helps them better interpret our meaning.

One social norm that structures our communication is turn taking. People need to feel like they are contributing something to an interaction, so turn taking is a central part of how conversations play out (Crystal, 2005). Although we sometimes talk at the same time as others or interrupt them, there are numerous verbal and nonverbal cues, almost like a dance, that are exchanged between speakers that let people know when their turn will begin or end. Conversations do not always neatly progress from beginning to end with shared understanding along the way. There is a back and forth that is often verbally managed through rephrasing ("Let me try that again,") and clarification ("Does that make sense?") (Crystal, 2005)

We also have certain units of speech that facilitate turn taking. Adjacency pairs are related communication structures that come one after the other (adjacent to each other) in an interaction (Crystal, 2005). For example, questions are followed by answers, greetings are followed by responses, compliments are followed by a thank you, and informative comments are followed by an acknowledgment. These are the skeletal components that make up our verbal interactions, and they are largely social in that they facilitate our interactions. When these sequences don't work out, confusion, miscommunication, or frustration may result, as you can see in the following sequences:

Travis:
"How are you?"

Wanda:
"Did someone tell you I'm sick?"

Darrell:
"I just wanted to let you know the meeting has been moved to three o'clock."

Leigh:
"I had cake for breakfast this morning."

Some conversational elements are highly scripted or ritualized, especially the beginning and end of an exchange and topic changes (Crystal, 2005). Conversations often begin with a standard greeting and then proceed to "safe" exchanges about things in the immediate field of experience of the communicators (a comment on the weather or noting something going on in the scene). At this point, once the ice is broken, people can move on to other more content-specific exchanges. Once conversing, before we can initiate a topic change, it is a social norm that we let the current topic being discussed play itself out or continue until the person who introduced the topic seems satisfied. We then usually try to find a relevant tie-in or segue that acknowledges the previous topic, in turn acknowledging the speaker, before actually moving on. Changing the topic without following such social conventions might indicate to the other person that you were not listening or are simply rude.

Ending a conversation is similarly complex. I'm sure we've all been in a situation where we are "trapped" in a conversation that we need or want to get out of. Just walking away or ending a conversation without engaging in socially acceptable "leave-taking behaviors" would be considered a breach of social norms. Topic changes are often places where people can leave a conversation, but it is still routine for us to give a special reason for leaving, often in an apologetic tone (whether we mean it or not). Generally though, conversations come to an end through the cooperation of both people, as they offer and recognize typical signals that a topic area has been satisfactorily covered or that one or both people need to leave.

Language and Cultural Context

Culture isn't solely determined by a person's native language or nationality. It's true that languages vary by country and region and that the language we speak influences our realities, but even people who speak the same language experience cultural differences because of their various intersecting cultural identities and personal experiences. We have a tendency to view our language as a whole more favorably than other languages. Although people may make persuasive arguments regarding which languages are more pleasing to the ear or difficult or easy to learn than others, no one language enables speakers to communicate more effectively than another (McCornack, 2007).

From birth we are socialized into our various cultural identities. As with the social context, this acculturation process is a combination of explicit and implicit lessons. A child in Colombia, which is considered a more collectivist country in which people value group membership and cohesion over individualism, may not be explicitly told, "You are a member of a collectivistic culture, so you should care more about the family and community than yourself." This cultural value would be transmitted through daily actions and through language use. Just as babies acquire knowledge of language practices at an astonishing rate in their first two years of life, so do they acquire cultural knowledge and values that are embedded in those language practices. At nine months old, it is possible to distinguish babies based on their language. Even at this early stage of development, when most babies are babbling and just learning to recognize but not wholly reproduce verbal interaction patterns, a Colombian baby would sound different from a Brazilian baby, even though neither would actually be using words from their native languages of Spanish and Portuguese (Crystal, 2005).

The actual language we speak plays an important role in shaping our reality. Comparing languages, we can see differences in how we are able to talk about the world. In English, we have the words *grandfather* and *grandmother*, but no single word that distinguishes between a maternal grandfather and a paternal grandfather. But in Swedish, there's a specific word for each grandparent: *morfar* is mother's father, *farfar* is father's father, *farmor* is father's mother, and *mormor* is mother's mother (Crystal, 2005). In this example, we can see that the words available to us, based on the language we speak, influence how we talk about the world due to differences in and limitations of vocabulary. The notion that language shapes our view of reality and our cultural patterns is best represented by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Although some scholars argue that our reality is determined by our language, we will take a more qualified view and presume that language plays a central role in influencing our realities but doesn't determine them (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Culturally influenced differences in language and meaning can lead to some interesting encounters, ranging from awkward to informative to disastrous. In terms of awkwardness, you have likely heard stories of companies that failed to exhibit communication competence in their naming and/or advertising of products in another language. For example, in Taiwan, Pepsi used the slogan "Come Alive with Pepsi" only to later find out that when translated it meant, "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the dead" (Kwintessential Limited, 2012). Similarly, American Motors introduced a new car called the Matador to the Puerto Rico market only to learn that *Matador* means "killer," which wasn't very comforting to potential buyers (Kwintessential, 2012). At a more informative level, the words we use to give positive reinforcement are culturally relative. In the United States and England, parents commonly positively and negatively reinforce their child's behavior by saying, "Good girl" or "Good boy." There isn't an equivalent for such a phrase in other European languages, so the usage in only these two countries has been traced back to the puritan influence on beliefs about good and bad behavior (Wierzbicka, 2004). In terms of disastrous consequences, one of the most publicized and deadliest cross-cultural business mistakes occurred in India in 1984. Union Carbide, an American company, controlled a plant used to make pesticides. The company underestimated the amount of cross-cultural training that would be

needed to allow the local workers, many of whom were not familiar with the technology or language/jargon used in the instructions for plant operations to do their jobs. This lack of competent communication led to a gas leak that immediately killed more than two thousand people and over time led to more than five hundred thousand injuries (Varma, 2012).

Accents and Dialects

Accents are distinct styles of pronunciation (Lustig & Koester, 2006). There can be multiple accents within one dialect. For example, people in the Appalachian Mountains of the eastern United States speak a dialect of American English that is characterized by remnants of the linguistic styles of Europeans who settled the area a couple hundred years earlier. Even though they speak this similar dialect, a person in Kentucky could still have an accent that is distinguishable from a person in western North Carolina.

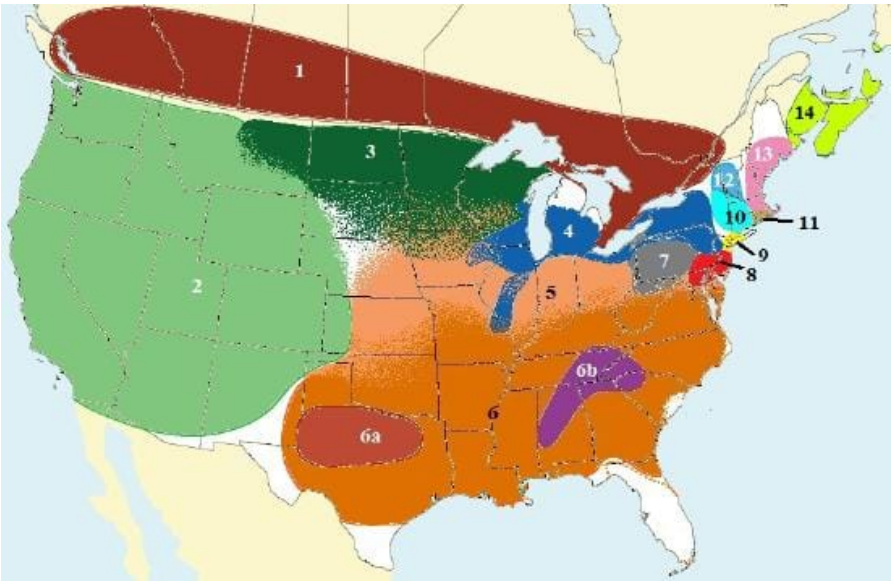


Figure 3.4.1: American English has several dialects that vary based on region, class, and ancestry. Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 4.0.

Dialects and accents can vary by region, class, or ancestry, and they influence the impressions that we make of others. When I moved to Colorado from North Carolina, I was met with a very strange look when I used the word *buggy* to refer to a shopping cart. Research shows that people tend to think more positively about others who speak with a dialect similar to their own and think more negatively about people who speak differently. Although dialects include the use of different words and phrases, it's the tone of voice that often creates the strongest impression. For example, a person who speaks with a Southern accent may perceive a New Englander's accent to be grating, harsh, or rude because the pitch is more nasal and the rate faster. Conversely, a New Englander may perceive a Southerner's accent to be syrupy and slow, leading to an impression that the person speaking is uneducated.

Customs and Norms

Social norms are culturally relative. The words used in politeness rituals in one culture can mean something completely different in another. For example, *thank you* in American English acknowledges receiving something (a gift, a favor, a compliment), in British English it can mean "yes" similar to American English's *yes, please*, and in French *merci* can mean "no" as in "no, thank you" (Crystal, 2005). Additionally, what is considered a powerful language style varies from culture to culture. Confrontational language, such as swearing, can be seen as powerful in Western cultures, even though it violates some language taboos, but would be seen as immature and weak in Japan (Wetzel, 1988).

Gender also affects how we use language, but not to the extent that most people think. Although there is a widespread belief that men are more likely to communicate in a clear and straightforward way and women are more likely to communicate in an emotional and indirect way, a meta-analysis of research findings from more than two hundred studies found only small differences in the personal disclosures of men and women (Dindia & Allen, 1992). Men and women's levels of disclosure are even more similar when engaging in cross-gender communication, meaning men and woman are more similar when speaking to each other than when men speak to men or women speak to women. This could be due to the internalized pressure to speak about the other

gender in socially sanctioned ways, in essence reinforcing the stereotypes when speaking to the same gender but challenging them in cross-gender encounters. 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). These findings, which state that men and women communicate more similarly during cross-gender encounters and then communicate in more stereotypical ways in same-gender encounters, can be explained with communication accommodation theory.

Communication Accommodation and Code-Switching

Communication accommodation theory is a theory that explores why and how people modify their communication to fit situational, social, cultural, and relational contexts (Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1973). Within communication accommodation, conversational partners may use **convergence**, meaning a person makes his or her communication more like another person's. People who are accommodating in their communication style are seen as more competent, which illustrates the benefits of communicative flexibility. In order to be flexible, of course, people have to be aware of and monitor their own and others' communication patterns. Conversely, conversational partners may use **divergence**, meaning a person uses communication to emphasize the differences between his or her conversational partner and his or herself.

Convergence and divergence can take place within the same conversation and may be used by one or both conversational partners. Convergence functions to make others feel at ease, to increase understanding, and to enhance social bonds. Divergence may be used to intentionally make another person feel unwelcome or perhaps to highlight a personal, group, or cultural identity. For example, African American women use certain verbal communication patterns when communicating with other African American women as a way to highlight their racial identity and create group solidarity. In situations where multiple races interact, the women usually don't use those same patterns, instead accommodating the language patterns of the larger group. While communication accommodation might involve anything from adjusting how fast or slow you talk to how long you speak during each turn, **code-switching** refers to changes in accent, dialect, or language (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). There are many reasons that people might code-switch. Regarding accents, some people hire vocal coaches or speech-language pathologists to help them alter their accent. If a Southern person thinks their accent is leading others to form unfavorable impressions, they can consciously change their accent with much practice and effort. Once their ability to speak without their Southern accent is honed, they may be able to switch very quickly between their native accent when speaking with friends and family and their modified accent when speaking in professional settings.



Figure 3.4.2: People who work or live in multilingual settings may engage in code-switching several times a day. Eltpics – Welsh – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Additionally, people who work or live in multilingual settings may code-switch many times throughout the day, or even within a single conversation. Increasing outsourcing and globalization have produced heightened pressures for code-switching. Call center workers in India have faced strong negative reactions from British and American customers who insist on "speaking to someone who speaks English." Although many Indians learn English in schools as a result of British colonization, their accents might prove to be off-putting to people who want to get their cable package changed or book an airline ticket. Now some Indian call center workers are going through intense training to be able to code-switch and accommodate the speaking style of their

customers. What is being called the “Anglo-Americanization of India” entails “accent-neutralization,” lessons on American culture (using things like *contemporary* DVDs), and the use of Anglo-American-sounding names like Sean and Peggy (Pal, 2004). As our interactions continue to occur in more multinational contexts, the expectations for code-switching and accommodation are sure to increase. It is important for us to consider the intersection of culture and power and think critically about the ways in which expectations for code-switching may be based on cultural biases.

Language and Cultural Bias

In the previous example about code-switching and communication accommodation in Indian call centers, the move toward accent neutralization is a response to the “racist abuse” these workers receive from customers (Nadeem, 2012). Anger in Western countries about job losses and economic uncertainty has increased the amount of racially targeted verbal attacks on international call center employees. It was recently reported that more call center workers are now quitting their jobs as a result of the verbal abuse and that 25 percent of workers who have recently quit say such abuse was a major source of stress (Gentleman, 2005). Such verbal attacks are not new; they represent a common but negative way that cultural bias explicitly manifests in our language use.

Cultural bias is a skewed way of viewing or talking about a group that is typically negative. Bias has a way of creeping into our daily language use, often under our awareness. Culturally biased language can make reference to one or more cultural identities, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ability. There are other sociocultural identities that can be the subject of biased language, but we will focus our discussion on these five. Much biased language is based on stereotypes and myths that influence the words we use. Bias is both intentional and unintentional, but as we’ve already discussed, we have to be accountable for what we say even if we didn’t “intend” a particular meaning—remember, meaning is generated; it doesn’t exist inside our thoughts or words. We will discuss specific ways in which cultural bias manifests in our language and ways to become more aware of bias. Becoming aware of and addressing cultural bias is not the same thing as engaging in “**political correctness**.” Political correctness takes awareness to the extreme but doesn’t do much to address cultural bias aside from make people feel like they are walking on eggshells. That kind of pressure can lead people to avoid discussions about cultural identities or avoid people with different cultural identities. Our goal is not to eliminate all cultural bias from verbal communication or to never offend anyone, intentionally or otherwise. Instead, we will continue to use guidelines for ethical communication that we have already discussed and strive to increase our competence.

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4: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

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

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4.1: Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- 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.

As you'll recall from our introductory chapter, a channel is the sensory route on which a message travels. Oral communication only relies on 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. Since most of our communication relies on visual and auditory channels, those will be the focus of this chapter. But we can also receive messages and generate meaning through touch, taste, and smell. Touch is an especially powerful form of nonverbal communication that we will discuss in this chapter, but we will not get into taste and smell, which have not received as much scholarly attention in relation to nonverbal communication as the other senses.

To further define nonverbal communication, we need to distinguish between vocal and verbal aspects of communication. Verbal and nonverbal communication include both vocal and nonvocal elements, and Table 4.1 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 not verbal part of a spoken message, such as speaking rate, volume, and pitch. 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 like a written or signed symbol does.

Table 4.1.2 Vocal and Nonvocal Elements of Communication

	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.)

Source: Adapted from Owen Hargie, *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2011), 45.

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication has a distinct history and serves separate evolutionary functions from verbal communication. 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 the same 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 like 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. Recent and reliable findings claim that it is close 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). For example, 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. For example, the question "What are you doing tonight?" could mean any number of things, but we could rely on posture, tone of voice, and eye contact to see if the person is just curious, suspicious, or hinting that they would like company for the evening. 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, she avoids eye contact, she fidgets), she will likely not be viewed as highly credible. Conversely, in some situations, verbal communication might carry more meaning than nonverbal. 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.



Figure 4.1.1: "In Perfect Congruence" (CC BY 2.0; Gideon via Flickr)

Nonverbal Communication Is More Involuntary than Verbal

We sometimes verbally respond without thinking—like shouting "Ow!" when stubbing a toe or "Stop!" when someone is in danger. But involuntary nonverbal signals are far more common. While most nonverbal communication is not completely beyond our control, it often occurs below our conscious awareness, making it harder to regulate.

For example, you can force a smile and shake hands when greeting someone, but it's much harder to fake genuine happiness. Nonverbal "leakage" often reveals underlying emotions or attitudes, despite efforts to hide them. Public figures such as spokespeople or lawyers must carefully train themselves to manage facial expressions and gestures so their true feelings don't contradict their words. Even when we try not to communicate, we still send messages. A teenager giving a "blank stare" or sitting motionless is still expressing emotion and meaning. In this sense, nonverbal communication is irrepressible—it's impossible *not* to communicate (Andersen, 1999).

📊 **Table 4.2.2: Verbal vs. Nonverbal Involuntariness**

Aspect	Verbal Communication	Nonverbal Communication
Level of Control	Mostly voluntary	Often involuntary/subconscious
Frequency of Leakage	Rare (e.g., exclamations)	Common (facial expressions, posture, tone)
Example	Shouting “ouch!”	Eye roll, nervous fidgeting, blushing

Nonverbal Communication Is More Ambiguous

In Chapter 3 “Verbal Communication”, we learn that the symbolic and abstract nature of language can lead to misunderstandings, but 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 into 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 back 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.

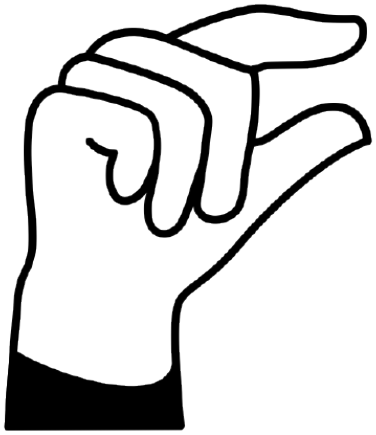
Functions of Nonverbal Communication

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 the ways in which nonverbal communication functions as a central part of relational communication and identity expression.

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Meaning

Nonverbal communication works alongside verbal communication to help us create meaning. It can reinforce what we say, such as using gestures to show size or smiling while telling a funny story. It can also substitute for words when language is limited, like when babies use facial expressions or when travelers use gestures to communicate across language barriers. In quiet spaces, noisy environments, or situations where words might be impolite, nonverbal cues are often the better choice.

Nonverbal signals can also contradict verbal messages. When someone’s words and tone or facial expression don’t match, we often trust the nonverbal message more. These mixed signals can cause confusion and, if repeated, may harm trust and credibility in relationships.



Created by Agung Rama
from Noun Project

Figure 4.1.2 "This big"

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 our 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 that were better liars were the ones that 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-serve table 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 like *Survivor* and *Big Brother* play what they've come to term 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. The following examples are true for most native speakers of

English. Pitch, which is a part of vocalics (or paralanguage), 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. Become a "people watcher" and 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.

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. Perceived levels 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.



Figure 4.1.3 Nonverbal Identity Expression

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.

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4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define kinesics.
- Define haptics.
- Define vocalics/paralanguage.
- Define proxemics.
- Define chronemics.
- Provide examples of types of nonverbal communication that fall under these categories.
- Discuss the ways in which personal presentation and environment provide nonverbal cues.

Just as verbal language is broken up into various categories, there are also different types of nonverbal communication. As we learn about each type of nonverbal signal, keep in mind that nonverbals often work in concert with each other, combining to repeat, modify, or contradict the verbal message being sent.

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. Specifically, this section will outline the use of gestures, head movements and 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 touching behaviors and movements that indicate internal states typically related to arousal or anxiety. Adaptors can be targeted toward the self, objects, or others. In regular social situations, adaptors result from uneasiness, anxiety, or a general sense that we are not in control of our surroundings. Many of us subconsciously click pens, shake our legs, or engage in other adaptors during classes, meetings, or while waiting as a way to do something with our excess energy. 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.

Emblems are gestures that have a specific agreed-on 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-on 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 with 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!” "Thumbs Up" (CC BY-SA 2.0; Kreg Steppe via Flickr)

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 meaning on their own 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

I group head movements and posture together because they are often both used to acknowledge others and communicate interest or attentiveness. In terms of head movements, a head nod is a universal 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 and almost universal head movement is the head shake back and forth to signal “no.” This nonverbal signal begins at birth, even before a baby has the ability to know that it has a corresponding meaning. Babies shake their head from side to side 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).

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 often shows informality and indifference, straddling a chair can be 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 indicates 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). To better understand oculesics, we

will discuss the characteristics and functions of eye contact and pupil dilation.

Eye contact serves multiple communicative functions. It regulates interaction by signaling when to speak or listen. Speakers often glance away while talking and return eye contact near the end of a turn, while listeners maintain steadier eye contact to show attention.

It also helps monitor interaction by providing feedback about engagement, confusion, or disinterest, and it conveys information: looking away often signals cognitive processing, while direct eye contact shows attentiveness.

Finally, eye contact communicates relational meaning. Depending on culture and context, it may signal connection, intimidation, flirtation, or a desire to avoid interaction.

Facial Expressions

The face is the most expressive part of the body, and basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust are recognizable across cultures. While these expressions are largely universal, cultural norms influence when and how they are displayed. For example, babies naturally show joy and surprise, but as people grow, they learn display rules that shape how emotions are expressed.

Smiles are especially powerful communicative signals. Many smiles are social rather than emotional, serving to build connection rather than reflect true feelings. Genuine smiles—sometimes called “smiles with the eyes”—are difficult to fake because they involve involuntary muscles around the eyes. People can usually tell the difference, which is why genuine smiles are perceived as warmer and more credible.

Facial expressions are also important in public speaking. They help set the emotional tone of a speech, signal friendliness and confidence, and shape how an audience judges credibility and competence. Expressions should match the content of the speech: animated smiles and bright eyes support humor or light topics, while serious expressions reinforce somber messages. Inconsistent expressions and content, however, can confuse audiences and reduce a speaker’s effectiveness.



Figure 4.2.2 Universal Facial Expressions

Haptics

Touch, studied under **haptics**, is a powerful form of nonverbal communication. It can comfort, persuade, or build connection, but it can also threaten when associated with sex or violence. Because touch is so influential, competence in its use is essential. A firm handshake, for example, can enhance impressions of confidence, while inappropriate touch can damage relationships or even result in legal consequences. Research shows that brief, appropriate touches can increase positive evaluations, generosity, and compliance.

Scholars identify several types of touch (Heslin & Apler, 1983):

- **Functional-professional:** goal-oriented and expected in professional settings (e.g., doctors, hairstylists).
- **Social-polite:** used to initiate interactions and show respect (e.g., handshakes, pats on the arm).
- **Friendship-warmth:** communicates closeness and care but may also create ambiguity about intent.
- **Love-intimacy:** expresses strong connection, often among close family, friends, or romantic partners (e.g., hugs, hand-holding).
- **Sexual-arousal:** the most intimate form, intended to physically stimulate.

Touch also occurs in other contexts such as play, conflict, or accidental contact, each carrying its own meaning. Because touch is both powerful and nuanced, its interpretation depends on context, relationship, and culture.

Vocalics/Paralanguage

Vocalics or **Paralanguage** refers to the vocal but nonverbal aspects of communication, such as pitch, volume, rate, tone, and verbal fillers. These elements shape how messages are understood and interpreted.

- **Pitch** helps convey meaning and regulate conversation. Rising pitch often signals a question, while falling pitch signals closure. Sarcasm, for example, is usually communicated through pitch and tone rather than words alone.
- **Volume** communicates intensity and varies by setting, relationship, and distance. Loudness may show excitement or anger, while a soft voice may signal secrecy or intimacy.
- **Rate** influences impressions of credibility and intelligence. Speaking too slowly may bore listeners, while speaking too quickly may overwhelm them. Slightly faster-than-average speech, paired with clear articulation, is often seen as more persuasive and credible.
- **Tone and vocal quality** give each person a unique "vocal signature." Voices with variety, resonance, and clarity are generally viewed more positively than monotone, nasal, or heavily accented voices.
- **Vocal fillers** such as "um," "uh," or "like" help speakers hold the floor while thinking. While common in conversation, excessive fillers in formal contexts can reduce credibility. Remember, when you give a speech, the floor is yours, so you don't need to hold the space with a verbal filler.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of how space and distance influence communication. Spatial metaphors like being "close" or "distant" reflect the link between space and relationships. Crowded environments, such as concerts or trains, may lead people to adjust their behavior, but unexpected invasions of personal space often cause discomfort. Research also suggests that extreme crowding can encourage negative or even aggressive behaviors. To better understand these dynamics, proxemics examines different personal space zones and 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). You can see how these zones relate to each other and to the individual in Figure 4.1 "Proxemic Zones of Personal Space". Even within a particular zone, interactions may differ depending on whether someone is in the outer or inner part of the zone.

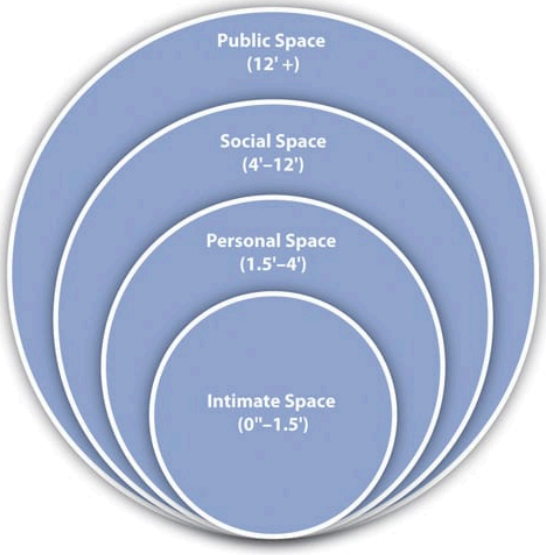


Figure 4.2.2: Proxemic Zones of Personal Space

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 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.

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. This distance is preferred in many professional settings because it reduces the suspicion of any impropriety. The expression “keep someone at an 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, but when people come much closer than six feet to us then 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.

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 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. 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 (0-1.5 Feet)

As we breach the invisible line that is 1.5 feet from our body, we enter the intimate zone, 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 in order 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.

Space Violations

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, your preferred place to sit in a restaurant, your usual desk in the classroom, or the seat you've marked to save while getting concessions at a sporting event, we claim certain spaces as our 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 in the same desk or at least 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 quarter, students moving voluntarily is rare. When someone else takes a student's regular desk, she or he is typically annoyed.

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.

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 and our communication competence and personal relationships can suffer.

Personal time refers to the ways in which 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.People with past-time orientations may want to reminisce about the past, 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 view 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.

Personal Presentation and Environment

Personal presentation includes our physical characteristics and the artifacts we use to express ourselves. Physical traits such as body shape, height, weight, and attractiveness strongly influence first impressions, even though cultural ideals vary. Attractive individuals often receive social advantages, and media-driven beauty standards fuel industries like fitness, fashion, and cosmetic surgery.

Artifacts—such as clothing, jewelry, tattoos, piercings, and hairstyles—also send powerful nonverbal messages. For example, tattoos and piercings may be seen as more or less appropriate depending on their size, location, and the setting. Hairstyles and body hair can communicate conservatism, individuality, or rebellion. Jewelry and symbols (e.g., wedding rings, crosses, rainbow flags) convey identity, beliefs, and affiliations.

Our environment also shapes communication. The objects and spaces we create—like books on a coffee table, flowers in a foyer, or the layout of furniture—signal messages about mood, status, and relationships. A therapist's office, for instance, may use soft lighting and comfortable chairs to promote openness, while luxury items may signal power or prestige. In sum, both our physical traits and the artifacts around us continually influence how others perceive and respond to us.

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4.3: Nonverbal Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

- Identify and employ strategies for improving competence with sending nonverbal messages.
- Identify and employ strategies for improving competence with interpreting nonverbal messages.

As we age, we internalize social and cultural norms related to sending (encoding) and interpreting (decoding) nonverbal communication. In terms of sending, the tendency of children to send unmonitored nonverbal signals reduces as we get older and begin to monitor and perhaps censor or mask them (Andersen, 1999). Likewise, as we become more experienced communicators we tend to think that we become better at interpreting nonverbal messages. In this section we will discuss some 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 chapter 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. Remember that 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 and 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 due to the fact that people who are more nonverbally expressive are also more attention getting and engaging and make people feel more welcome and warm due to increased immediacy behaviors, all of which enhance perceptions of charisma.



Figure 4.3.1: People who are more nonverbally expressive typically form more positive initial impressions, because expressivity in the form of immediacy behaviors is attention getting and welcoming. "Prince Harry of Wales greeting people" (CC BY 2.0; John Pannell via Wikimedia Commons)

Nonverbal Communication Is Multichannel

Be aware of the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication. 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.

When we become more aware of the messages we are sending, we can monitor for nonverbal signals that don't match the other messages we're receiving. If a student is talking to his professor about his performance in the class and concerns about his grade, the professor may lean forward and nod, encoding a combination of a body orientation and a head movement that conveys attention. If the professor, however, regularly breaks off eye contact and looks anxiously at her office door, then she is sending a message that could be perceived as disinterest, which is incongruent with the overall message of care and concern she probably wants 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 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). Think, for example, 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 match 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 on down the line to us.

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 Relates to 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. Active listening, for example, combines good cognitive listening practices with outwardly visible cues that signal to others that we are listening. We will learn more about active listening in Chapter 5 "Listening", but we all know from experience which nonverbal signals convey attentiveness and which convey a lack of attentiveness. 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 Relates to Impression Management

The nonverbal messages we encode also help us express our identities and play into impression management, which as we learned in Chapters 1 and 2, is a key part of communicating to achieve identity goals. Being able to control nonverbal expressions and competently encode them allows us to better manage our persona and project a desired self to others—for example, a self that is perceived as competent, intelligent, and engaging. Being nonverbally expressive during initial interactions usually leads to more favorable impressions. So 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).

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. One way to increase your 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). Rather than using a list of specific *rule*s, it would be helpful to develop more general *tools* that will be useful in and adaptable to a variety of contexts.

Certain 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, he or she 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.

Read Nonverbal Cues in Context

We will learn more specifics about nonverbal communication in relational, professional, and cultural contexts in Section 4.1, 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 his or her 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.

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4.4: Nonverbal Communication in Context

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in relational contexts.
- Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in professional contexts.
- Provide examples of cultural differences in nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication receives less attention than verbal communication as a part of 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 in all aspects of our lives. In addition, learning about cultural differences in nonverbal communication is important for people traveling abroad but also due to our increasingly multinational business world and the expanding diversity and increased frequency of intercultural communication within our own borders.

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 expressivity, and people generally find attractive and want to pay more attention to things that are 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, so 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 his or her 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 his or her 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 around 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.



Figure 4.4.1: "Hug" (CC BY 2.0; Kevin Dooley via Flickr)

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, more direct 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.

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. One study found that salespeople who were skilled at recognizing emotions through nonverbal cues sold more products and earned higher salaries (Byron, Terranova, & Nowicki Jr., 2007). 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 and the 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, but the biggest cultural differences in nonverbal communication occur within the categories of eye contact, touch, and personal space (Pease & Pease, 2004). Next, we will overview 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.



Figure 4.4.2 Understanding Each Other

Gestures

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 also means "up yours" 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 gesture, however, means "up yours twice" in Greece. So using that familiar gesture to say you give up in a disagreement might actually end up escalating rather than ending a conflict if used in Greece.

Head Movements

Bowing is a nonverbal greeting ritual that is more common in Asian cultures than Western cultures, but the head nod, which is a common form of acknowledgement 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. Because of this, 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 of 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 Native American 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 a Native American 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. 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, and 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 his or her 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 he or she is saying. In fact, it is a touch intended to keep the partner from raising his or her 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 US Americans, it is a nonverbal norm in Italian culture and may be the only way to get to contribute to a conversation (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Vocalics/Paralanguage

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 US Americans would consider this a violation of personal space, and Europeans often perceive US Americans to be rude in such contexts because they do not control the volume of their conversations more. Since personal space is usually more plentiful in the United States, Americans are used to speaking at a level that is considered loud to many cultures that are used to less personal space. I have personally experienced both sides of this while traveling abroad. One time, my friends and I were asked to leave a restaurant in Sweden because another table complained that we were being loud. Another time, at a restaurant in Argentina, I was disturbed, as were the others dining around me, by a "loud" table of Americans seated on the other side of the dining area. In this case, even though we were also Americans, we were bothered by the lack of cultural awareness being exhibited by the other Americans at the restaurant. These examples show how proxemics and vocalics can combine to make for troubling, but hopefully informative, nonverbal intercultural encounters.

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. Countries in South America and southern Europe exhibit characteristics of contact cultures, while countries in northern Europe and Southeast Asia exhibit noncontact cultural 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 polychromic cultures cancel appointments or close businesses for family obligations. Conversely, people from polychromic cultures feel that US Americans, for example, follow their schedules at the expense of personal relationships (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

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5: LISTENING

5.1: Listening Process
5.2: Importance of Listening
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
5.4: Improving Listening Competence

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5.1: Listening Process

Learning Objectives

- Define listening.
- Review the stages of the listening process.

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.

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.



Figure 5.1.1 The Listening Process

Receiving

Before we can engage other steps in the listening process, we must take in stimuli. 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 email, text, and phone interactions presents some difficulties for reading contextual clues into meaning received through only auditory channels.

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 noise 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 interfere with the physiological aspects of hearing. Psychological noise like stress and anger interfere primarily with the cognitive processes of listening. We can enhance our ability to receive, and, in turn, listen, by trying to minimize distractions.

Interpreting/Understanding

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.

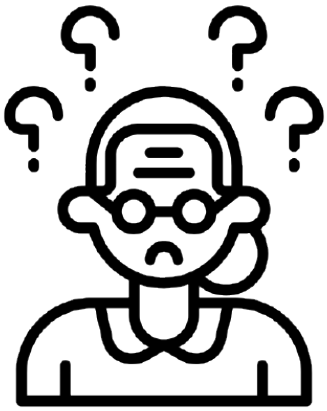
Recalling/Remembering

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% after eight hours, and recall 20% after a day (Hargie, 189–99). Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Hargie, 184).

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 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. Information here can be stored indefinitely (Hargie, 184). 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 as well as 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. 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?"



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Figure 5.1.2 Bad Memory

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 accurate and 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 off 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?” Listeners respond to speakers nonverbally during a message using back-channel cues and verbally after hearing messages.

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5.2: Importance of Listening

Learning Objectives

- Understand the functions and types of listening
- Identify the different styles of listeners

Listening Functions

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 communication goals: physical, instrumental, relational, and identity. 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 (Zabaya and Wolvin, 215–17). 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, according to the 2011 "Job Outlook" published by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

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, 283–90). 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 and Helms-Erikson, 37).

The following list reviews some of the main functions of listening that are relevant in multiple contexts:

- 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 and Villaume, 48). The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic (Watson et al., 1–13).

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 to a sound coming from 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, 185). 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 re-create nuanced behavior (Wolvin and Coakley, 18–19).

Informational Listening

Informational listening entails *listening with the goal of comprehending and retaining 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, voicemail, 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.



Figure 5.2.1 Listening intently

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). 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. People often disguise inferences as facts. 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. 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, 188). 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 (for more information, visit http://www.justice.gov.za/trc). 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 Worker's 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 (for more information, visit http://www.greensborotrc.org/truth_reconciliation.php).

The truth and reconciliation process seeks to heal relations between opposing sides by uncovering all pertinent facts, distinguishing truth from lies, and allowing for acknowledgment, 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% of people have more than one preferred listening style and that they choose a style based on the listening situation (Bodie and Villaume, 50). Other research finds that people often still revert back 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, 82). 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 when 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.

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5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening

Learning Objectives

- Identify environment and physical barriers to listening
- Identify personal and cognitive barriers to listening
- Understand poor listening practices and how they can be a barrier to effective listening

Barriers to Effective Listening

Obstacles to listening can appear at every stage of the process (Hargie, 200). At the receiving stage, background noise may block or distort messages before they even reach us. During interpretation, abstract or complex ideas may resist connection to prior experience, leaving us confused. When recalling, the limits of memory and concentration interfere with retention. In evaluation, biases and assumptions can filter or distort what we hear. Finally, at the responding stage, poor paraphrasing or weak questioning skills may create misunderstanding.

These barriers do not act in isolation. A noisy room makes interpretation harder, distraction reduces recall, and unchecked prejudice may warp evaluation long before we have the chance to respond. To understand how listening breaks down, we can group these obstacles into three broad categories: environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and poor listening practices.

Environmental and Physical Barriers

The spaces we occupy shape how well we listen. Lighting, temperature, and seating arrangements may all enhance or hinder attentiveness. A dimly lit room encourages drowsiness, while a too-warm or too-cold environment draws focus to discomfort rather than the speaker. Proximity matters as well—direct eye contact and close seating typically foster engagement, while scattered or obstructive arrangements do the opposite. Interestingly, groups often identify leaders based on position at a table, such as the center or head, where visibility and accessibility subtly project authority (Anderson, 57–58).

Noise adds another layer of distraction. The whir of an air conditioner, the bark of a dog, or the drone of construction can disrupt even the most focused listeners.

Barriers also emerge from within our bodies in the form of **physiological noise**—illness, injury, or stress that interferes with processing. A pounding headache or lingering cold may not stop us from hearing words, but they prevent us from giving them full attention.

Equally influential is **psychological noise**, which arises from mental and emotional states. Strong feelings—love, anger, worry—can hijack attention as easily as pain. Often, psychological and physiological noise overlap. Fatigue combines mental exhaustion with physical weakness, while anxiety produces both racing thoughts and bodily symptoms such as trembling or sweating. These overlaps remind us that body and mind continually interact in shaping how well we listen.



Figure 5.3.1 Overstimulation

Cognitive and Personal Barriers

Even in ideal physical settings, our own minds pose challenges. Cognitive limits, lack of preparation, disorganized messages, and personal biases can all interfere with listening. One major factor is our ability to process information faster than others can speak. While most people speak at 125–175 words per minute, we can process 400–800 (Hargie, 195). This gap leaves mental space for distraction. Sometimes we drift into daydreams or multitasking, treating our attention like a wall of televisions tuned to different channels. Unless we consciously direct extra processing toward reinforcing a message—by repeating, rephrasing, or reorganizing information—we risk letting competing thoughts drown it out.

Personal concerns further complicate listening. Self-consciousness may pull focus toward how we look or what others think of us, while lack of motivation can cause us to tune out messages we do not find relevant. Selective attention ensures that we notice information that benefits us, like a student perking up at the words “This will be on the exam” after zoning out during lecture.

The speech–thought gap also feeds response preparation—the habit of rehearsing what we will say next while a speaker is still talking. Planning a response is natural, but when it begins too soon, we stop listening for understanding and instead listen only to reply.

Finally, prejudice creates one of the most damaging barriers. Prejudiced listening occurs when we prejudge a speaker or topic based on identity or assumptions and stop engaging openly. As Oscar Wilde quipped, “Listening is a very dangerous thing. If one listens one may be convinced.” To avoid being challenged, we may tune out, selectively hear only agreeable points, or avoid certain speakers altogether. Prejudices tied to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or occupation often lead us to assume we already know what will be said, effectively shutting down the listening process. Remaining open and practicing perception checking are key to overcoming this barrier.

Poor Listening Practices

While some barriers are difficult to eliminate, others take the form of bad habits that can be addressed with awareness and effort. Common poor practices include **interrupting, distorted listening, eavesdropping, aggressive listening, narcissistic listening,** and **pseudo-listening.**

- **Interrupting.** Turn-taking in conversation is like a dance, and interruptions throw off the rhythm. Not all interruptions are harmful—some show enthusiasm or provide necessary directions—but repeated or unnecessary interruptions suggest inattentiveness or even dominance. Whether intentional or not, interruptions can damage impressions and disrupt the flow of communication.
- **Distorted Listening.** Distortion happens when we misinterpret, reorder, or reshape information to fit our own views. A

student might reinterpret feedback as unfair grading rather than their own mistakes, or a listener may change details when retelling a story. Distortion can range from harmless mix-ups to serious consequences, such as spreading false rumors or miscommunicating medical instructions.

- **Eavesdropping.** Unlike overhearing, eavesdropping involves a deliberate attempt to listen secretly. Motivations vary—curiosity, suspicion, or gossip—but the practice violates privacy and can damage trust if discovered. It also risks exposing the listener to hurtful or unwanted information.
- **Aggressive Listening.** Also called "ambushing," aggressive listening occurs when someone listens only to attack or criticize. Frustration or insecurity often fuels this habit. The result is not constructive dialogue but escalating conflict, where the listener's goal is to undermine rather than understand.
- **Narcissistic Listening.** Narcissistic listeners make conversations about themselves. They redirect attention with pivots ("That reminds me of…") and one-up others' stories ("That's nothing, let me tell you about…"). While occasional sharing is normal, chronic self-focus prevents supportive listening and frustrates partners.
- **Pseudo-Listening.** Finally, pseudo-listening is the act of pretending to listen while attention is elsewhere. Nods, eye contact, and verbal cues may mask disengagement, but when tested, the pseudo-listener cannot recall or respond meaningfully. Though sometimes used as a politeness strategy—such as listening to a repeated story—it should not become a habitual substitute for genuine engagement.

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5.4: Improving Listening Competence

Learning Objectives

- Improve listening competence at each stage of the listening process
- Understand how to create listenable messages and to give effective feedback

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 lists indicate (Ridge, 5–6).

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.

To improve listening at the **interpreting/understanding** 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.

To improve listening at the **recalling/remembering** 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.

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.

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 or 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 refers to the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices and is characterized by mentally preparing yourself to listen, working to maintain focus on concentration, using appropriate verbal and nonverbal back-channel cues to signal attentiveness, and engaging in strategies like note taking and mentally reorganizing information to help with recall.

Listenable Messages and Effective Feedback

Listening is not just about receiving messages—it also depends on how clearly messages are sent. A passive view of listening overlooks the fact that speakers play an active role in facilitating comprehension, and listeners continue the process by providing feedback to others and to themselves.

Creating Listenable Messages

Many listening challenges could be reduced if speakers created listenable messages—oral messages designed to be easily understood (Rubin, 269). While most communication is spoken, not all spoken messages are delivered in an oral style. Problems arise when written conventions slip into oral delivery. For instance, reading dictionary definitions or research quotes word-for-word often leads to verbal stumbles that distract listeners and block comprehension.

This usually isn't an issue in casual conversation, where we naturally use an oral style. But in prepared messages like speeches, we tend to slip into written patterns because most of our training emphasizes writing, not speaking. As a result, many students are left to figure out effective oral style through trial and error. Developing the ability to craft spoken messages distinct from written ones is therefore a key skill for effective public speaking.

Since not every speaker will succeed in creating listenable messages, listeners must sometimes mentally restructure or clarify what they hear. Still, as speakers, we can make messages far more listenable by following a few basic strategies:

- Use short, active sentences.
- Incorporate personal pronouns ("I want to show you...").
- Organize ideas clearly with patterns such as problem–solution or compare–contrast.
- Guide listeners with transitions and markers ("first," "next," "in summary").
- Draw on examples relevant to shared experiences.

These techniques help align oral delivery with how audiences actually process spoken language, making listening less of a challenge and more of a shared exchange.



Figure 5.4.1 Conference Feedback

Giving Formal Feedback to Others

Effective feedback benefits both the giver and receiver. Positive comments can build confidence, while constructive negative feedback can clarify perceptions and lead to improvement. Poorly delivered criticism, however, risks damaging self-esteem and creating communication problems. Since performance reviews, peer evaluations, and group assessments are common in academic, professional, and civic settings, learning to provide competent feedback is an essential skill.

Guidelines for Giving Feedback

- **Be specific.** Avoid vague comments like “eye contact.” Instead, describe what you observed: “You looked at your notes more than the audience during the first 30 seconds.”
- **Be descriptive.** Add detail to make feedback clearer and more useful.
- **Be positive.** Frame comments in a supportive way to avoid defensiveness. For example, replace “stop fidgeting” with “try keeping your hands on the podium to appear more confident.”
- **Be constructive.** Go beyond praise. “Good job” is nice, but not helpful. Instead: “Your explanation of the marketing strategy was clear; you could apply the same approach to the crisis plan section.”
- **Be realistic.** Feedback should focus on what can be changed. Telling someone to “lose the accent” is unhelpful; suggesting strategies for clarity or audience adaptation is better.
- **Be relevant.** Keep comments tied to the task. Compliments like “nice smile” may be kind but aren’t useful in most formal feedback settings.

In short, effective feedback is clear, respectful, and actionable. It focuses on behaviors that can be improved rather than traits that cannot, ensuring that feedback builds competence and confidence rather than undermining them.

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6: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT

6.1: Principles of Interpersonal Communication
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication
6.3: Emotions and Interpersonal Communication
6.4: Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Communication

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6.1: Principles of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define interpersonal communication.
- Discuss the functional aspects of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication is the process of exchanging messages between people whose lives mutually influence one another in unique ways in relation to social and cultural norms. This definition highlights the fact that interpersonal communication involves two or more people who are interdependent to some degree and who build a unique bond based on the larger social and cultural contexts to which they belong. So a brief exchange with a grocery store clerk who you don't know wouldn't be considered interpersonal communication, because you and the clerk are not influencing each other in significant ways. Obviously, if the clerk were a friend, family member, coworker, or romantic partner, the communication would fall into the interpersonal category. In this section, we discuss the importance of studying interpersonal communication and explore its functional and cultural aspects.

Why Study Interpersonal Communication?

Interpersonal communication plays a big role in our lives. It helped early humans survive, as those who bonded with others were more likely to pass on their genes (Leary, 2001). Strong communication skills also improve mental and physical health. People with these skills handle stress better, have more friends, and are less likely to feel depressed or anxious (Hargie, 2011). On the other hand, isolation can seriously harm people. Feral children, who grew up without human contact, often suffer long-term damage (Candland, 1995). Solitary confinement in prisons is also linked to major psychological issues (Shalev, 2011).

Good communication doesn't just help your health and relationships—it's also a top skill employers want (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010). But we aren't born knowing how to communicate well. We need to learn basic skills to get better at it.

Think of a time when a quick exchange changed a relationship. You might not have meant it, but that's because communication is strategic—we use it to meet goals. If you're usually successful in conversations, you might already be good at interpersonal communication.

Being a strong communicator means being both *effective* (getting your point across) and *appropriate* (doing it in a respectful way). For example, if you yell "Get out!" to your sister, you may succeed in making her leave, but it could hurt your relationship. A more respectful approach, like asking for help calmly, would be both effective and appropriate. This chapter will help you understand how to become a more competent communicator by balancing both.

Functional Aspects of Interpersonal Communication

We communicate with others to meet different personal needs, often without even realizing it. These needs fall into three main categories: instrumental, relational, and self-presentation goals. **Instrumental goals** involve getting things done, like asking a friend for help, getting information from a coworker, or offering support to someone who's upset. **Relational goals** focus on maintaining positive relationships, which may involve spending time together, making small sacrifices, celebrating milestones, or having important talks to define the relationship—like deciding whether you're just friends or something more. These actions help keep relationships healthy, like regular tune-ups for a car. **Self-presentation goals** are about managing how others see us. Just like public figures manage their image, we adjust our behavior depending on the situation—acting helpful at work, friendly with a new roommate, or even pretending to be clueless to avoid responsibility. These three goals often overlap. Sometimes we prioritize one over the others, like putting your partner's career first (relational), asking a friend for urgent help (instrumental), or trying to impress a boss (self-presentation). In the end, communication helps us meet goals, build connections, and create shared "worlds" with the people in our lives.



Figure 6.1.1 Intergenerational Relationship

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6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define interpersonal conflict.
- Compare and contrast the five styles of interpersonal conflict management.
- Explain how perception and culture influence interpersonal conflict.
- List strategies for effectively managing conflict.

Who do you have the most conflict with right now? Your answer to this question probably depends on the various contexts in your life. If you still live at home with a parent or parents, you may have daily conflicts with your family as you try to balance your autonomy, or desire for independence, with the practicalities of living under your family's roof. If you've recently moved into an apartment that you share, you may be negotiating roommate conflicts as you adjust to living with someone you may not know at all. You probably also have experiences managing conflict in romantic relationships and in the workplace. So think back and ask yourself, "How well do I handle conflict?" As with all areas of communication, we can improve if we have the background knowledge to identify relevant communication phenomena and the motivation to reflect on and enhance our communication skills.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict occurs in interactions where there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints. Interpersonal conflict may be expressed verbally or nonverbally along a continuum ranging from a nearly imperceptible cold shoulder to a very obvious blowout. Interpersonal conflict is, however, distinct from interpersonal violence, which goes beyond communication to include abuse. Domestic violence is a serious issue and is discussed in the section "The Dark Side of Relationships."

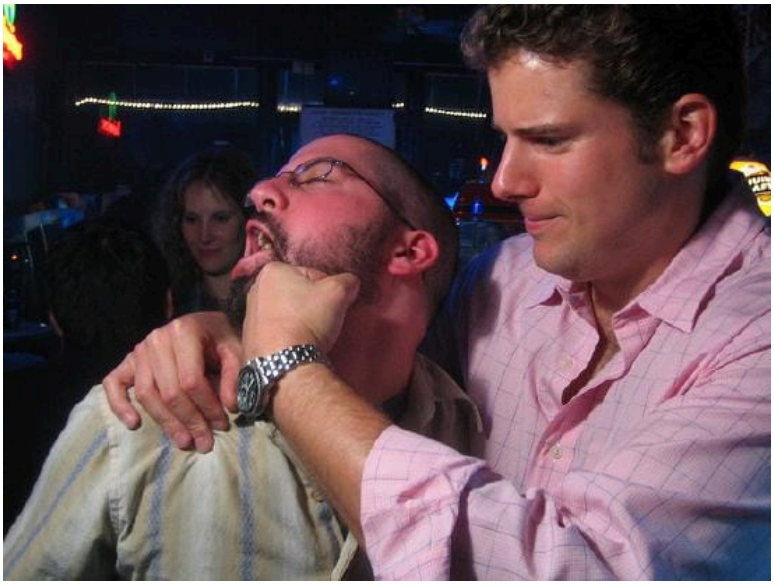


Figure 6.2.1 Interpersonal conflict is distinct from interpersonal violence, which goes beyond communication to include abuse. Bobafred – Fist Fight – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Conflict is an inevitable part of close relationships and can take a negative emotional toll. It takes effort to ignore someone or be passive aggressive, and the anger or guilt we may feel after blowing up at someone are valid negative feelings. However, conflict isn't always negative or unproductive. In fact, numerous research studies have shown that quantity of conflict in a relationship is not as important as how the conflict is handled (Markman et al., 1993). Additionally, when conflict is well managed, it has the potential to lead to more rewarding and satisfactory relationships (Canary & Messman, 2000).

Improving your competence in dealing with conflict can yield positive effects in the real world. Since conflict is present in our personal and professional lives, the ability to manage conflict and negotiate desirable outcomes can help us be more successful at both. Whether you and your partner are trying to decide what brand of flat-screen television to buy or discussing the upcoming political election with your mother, the potential for conflict is present. In professional settings, the ability to engage in conflict management, sometimes called conflict resolution, is a necessary and valued skill. However, many professionals do not receive training in conflict management even though they are expected to do it as part of their job (Gates, 2006). A lack of training and a lack of competence could be a recipe for disaster, which is illustrated in an episode of *The Office* titled "Conflict Resolution." In the episode, Toby, the human-resources officer, encourages office employees to submit anonymous complaints about their coworkers. Although Toby doesn't attempt to resolve the conflicts, the employees feel like they are being heard. When Michael, the manager, finds out there is unresolved conflict, he makes the anonymous complaints public in an attempt to encourage resolution, which backfires, creating more conflict within the office. As usual, Michael doesn't demonstrate communication competence; however, there are career paths for people who do have an interest in or talent for conflict management. In fact, being a mediator was named one of the best careers for 2011 by *U.S. News and World Report*.[1] Many colleges and universities now offer undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, or certificates in conflict resolution. Being able to manage conflict situations can make life more pleasant rather than letting a situation stagnate or escalate. The negative effects of poorly handled conflict could range from an awkward last few weeks of the semester with a college roommate to violence or divorce. However, there is no absolute right or wrong way to handle a conflict. Remember that being a competent communicator doesn't mean that you follow a set of absolute rules. Rather, a competent communicator assesses multiple contexts and applies or adapts communication tools and skills to fit the dynamic situation.

Conflict Management Styles

Would you describe yourself as someone who prefers to avoid conflict? Do you like to get your way? Are you good at working with someone to reach a solution that is mutually beneficial? Odds are that you have been in situations where you could answer yes to each of these questions, which underscores the important role context plays in conflict and conflict management styles in particular. The way we view and deal with conflict is learned and contextual. Is the way you handle conflicts similar to the way your parents handle conflict? If you're of a certain age, you are likely predisposed to answer this question with a certain "No!" It wasn't until my late twenties and early thirties that I began to see how similar I am to my parents, even though I, like many, spent years trying to distinguish myself from them. Research does show that there is intergenerational transmission of traits related to conflict management. As children, we test out different conflict resolution styles we observe in our families with our parents and siblings. Later, as we enter adolescence and begin developing platonic and romantic relationships outside the family, we begin testing what we've learned from our parents in other settings. If a child has observed and used negative conflict management styles with siblings or parents, he or she is likely to exhibit those behaviors with non–family members (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998).

There has been much research done on different types of conflict management styles, which are communication strategies that attempt to avoid, address, or resolve a conflict. Keep in mind that we don't always consciously choose a style. We may instead be caught up in emotion and become reactionary. The strategies for more effectively managing conflict that will be discussed later may allow you to slow down the reaction process, become more aware of it, and intervene in the process to improve your communication. A powerful tool to mitigate conflict is information exchange. Asking for more information before you react to a conflict-triggering event is a good way to add a buffer between the trigger and your reaction. Another key element is whether or not a communicator is oriented toward self-centered or other-centered goals. For example, if your goal is to "win" or make the other person "lose," you show a high concern for self and a low concern for other. If your goal is to facilitate a "win/win" resolution or outcome, you show a high concern for self and other. In general, strategies that facilitate information exchange and include concern for mutual goals will be more successful at managing conflict (Sillars, 1980).

The five strategies for managing conflict we will discuss are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Each of these conflict styles accounts for the concern we place on self versus other (see Figure 6.1 "Five Styles of Interpersonal Conflict Management").



Figure 6.2.2 Five Styles of Interpersonal Conflict Management Source: Adapted from M. Afzalur Rahim, "A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict," *Academy of Management Journal* 26, no. 2 (1983): 368–76.

In order to better understand the elements of the five styles of conflict management, we will apply each to the follow scenario. Rosa and D'Shaun have been partners for seventeen years. Rosa is growing frustrated because D'Shaun continues to give money to their teenage daughter, Casey, even though they decided to keep the teen on a fixed allowance to try to teach her more responsibility. While conflicts regarding money and child rearing are very common, we will see the numerous ways that Rosa and D'Shaun could address this problem.

Competing

The competing style indicates a high concern for self and a low concern for other. When we compete, we are striving to "win" the conflict, potentially at the expense or "loss" of the other person. One way we may gauge our win is by being granted or taking concessions from the other person. For example, if D'Shaun gives Casey extra money behind Rosa's back, he is taking an indirect competitive route resulting in a "win" for him because he got his way. The competing style also involves the use of power, which can be noncoercive or coercive (Sillars, 1980). Noncoercive strategies include requesting and persuading. When requesting, we suggest the conflict partner change a behavior. Requesting doesn't require a high level of information exchange. When we persuade, however, we give our conflict partner reasons to support our request or suggestion, meaning there is more information exchange, which may make persuading more effective than requesting. Rosa could try to persuade D'Shaun to stop giving Casey extra allowance money by bringing up their fixed budget, reminding him that they are saving for a summer vacation or pointing out Casey's tendency to spend her money on unnecessary/frivolous items. Coercive strategies violate standard guidelines for ethical communication and may include aggressive communication directed at rousing your partner's emotions through insults, profanity, and yelling, or through threats of punishment if you do not get your way. If Rosa is the primary income earner in the family, she could use that power to threaten to cancel D'Shaun's ATM card away if he continues giving Casey money. In all these scenarios, the "win" that could result is only short term and can lead to conflict escalation. Interpersonal conflict is rarely isolated, meaning there can be ripple effects that connect the current conflict to previous and future conflicts. D'Shaun's behind-the-scenes money giving or Rosa's cancellation of the ATM card could lead to built-up negative emotions that could further test their relationship.

> The competing style of conflict management is not the same thing as having a competitive personality. Competition in relationships isn't always negative, and people who enjoy engaging in competition may not always do so at the expense of another person's goals. In fact, research has shown that some couples engage in competitive shared activities like sports or games to maintain and enrich their relationship (Dindia & Baxter, 1987). And although we may think that competitiveness is gendered, research has often shown that women are just as competitive as men (Messman & Mikesell, 2000).

Avoiding

The avoiding style of conflict management often indicates a low concern for self and a low concern for other, and no or little direct

communication about the conflict takes place. However, as we will discuss later, in some cultures that emphasize group harmony over individual interests, and even in some situations in the United States, avoiding a conflict can indicate a high level of concern for the other. In general, avoiding doesn't mean that there is no communication about the conflict. Remember, *you cannot not communicate*. Even when we try to avoid conflict, we may intentionally or unintentionally give our feelings away through our verbal and nonverbal communication. Rosa's sarcastic tone as she tells D'Shaun that he's "Soooo good with money!" and his subsequent eye roll both bring the conflict to the surface without specifically addressing it. The avoiding style is either passive or indirect, meaning there is little information exchange, which may make this strategy less effective than others. We may decide to avoid conflict for many different reasons, some of which are better than others. If you view the conflict as having little importance to you, it may be better to ignore it. If the person you're having conflict with will only be working in your office for a week, you may perceive a conflict to be temporary and choose to avoid it and hope that it will solve itself. If you are not emotionally invested in the conflict, you may be able to reframe your perspective and see the situation in a different way, therefore resolving the issue. In all these cases, avoiding doesn't really require an investment of time, emotion, or communication skill, so there is not much at stake to lose.

Avoidance is not always an easy conflict management choice, because sometimes the person we have conflict with isn't a temp in our office or a weekend house guest. While it may be easy to tolerate a problem when you're not personally invested in it or view it as temporary, when faced with a situation like Rosa and D'Shaun's, avoidance would just make the problem worse. For example, avoidance could first manifest as changing the subject, then progress from avoiding the issue to avoiding the person altogether, to even ending the relationship.

> Indirect strategies of hinting and joking also fall under the avoiding style. While these indirect avoidance strategies may lead to a buildup of frustration or even anger, they allow us to vent a little of our built-up steam and may make a conflict situation more bearable. When we hint, we drop clues that we hope our partner will find and piece together to see the problem and hopefully change, thereby solving the problem without any direct communication. In almost all the cases of hinting that I have experienced or heard about, the person dropping the hints overestimates their partner's detective abilities. For example, when Rosa leaves the bank statement on the kitchen table in hopes that D'Shaun will realize how much extra money he is giving Casey, D'Shaun may simply ignore it or even get irritated with Rosa for not putting the statement with all the other mail. We also overestimate our partner's ability to decode the jokes we make about a conflict situation. It is more likely that the receiver of the jokes will think you're genuinely trying to be funny or feel provoked or insulted than realize the conflict situation that you are referencing. Passive-aggressive behavior is another way of dealing with conflict in which one person indirectly communicates their negative thoughts or feelings through nonverbal behaviors, such as not completing a task.

Accommodating

The accommodating conflict management style indicates a low concern for self and a high concern for other and is often viewed as passive or submissive, in that someone complies with or obliges another without providing personal input. The context for and motivation behind accommodating play an important role in whether or not it is an appropriate strategy. Generally, we accommodate because we are being generous, we are obeying, or we are yielding (Bobot, 2010). If we are being generous, we accommodate because we genuinely want to; if we are obeying, we don't have a choice but to accommodate (perhaps due to the potential for negative consequences or punishment); and if we yield, we may have our own views or goals but give up on them due to fatigue, time constraints, or because a better solution has been offered. Accommodating can be appropriate when there is little chance that our own goals can be achieved, when we don't have much to lose by accommodating, when we feel we are wrong, or when advocating for our own needs could negatively affect the relationship (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000). The occasional accommodation can be useful in maintaining a relationship—remember earlier we discussed putting another's needs before your own as a way to achieve relational goals. For example, Rosa may say, "It's OK that you gave Casey some extra money; she did have to spend more on gas this week since the prices went up." However, being a team player can slip into being a pushover, which people generally do not appreciate. If Rosa keeps telling D'Shaun, "It's OK this time," they may find themselves short on spending money at the end of the month. At that point, Rosa and D'Shaun's conflict may escalate as they question each other's motives, or the conflict may spread if they direct their frustration at Casey and blame it on her irresponsibility.

> Research has shown that the accommodating style is more likely to occur when there are time restraints and less likely to occur when someone does not want to appear weak (Cai & Fink, 2002). If you're standing outside the movie theatre and two movies are starting, you may say, "You choose," so you don't miss the beginning. If you're a new manager at an electronics

store and an employee wants to take Sunday off to watch a football game, you may say no to set an example for the other employees. As with avoiding, there are certain cultural influences we will discuss later that make accommodating a more effective strategy.

Compromising

The compromising style shows a moderate concern for self and other and may indicate that there is a low investment in the conflict and/or the relationship. Even though we often hear that the best way to handle a conflict is to compromise, the compromising style isn't a win/win solution; it is a partial win/lose. In essence, when we compromise, we give up some or most of what we want. It's true that the conflict gets resolved temporarily, but lingering thoughts of what you gave up could lead to a future conflict. Compromising may be a good strategy when there are time limitations or when prolonging a conflict may lead to relationship deterioration. Compromise may also be good when both parties have equal power or when other resolution strategies have not worked (Macintosh & Stevens, 2008).

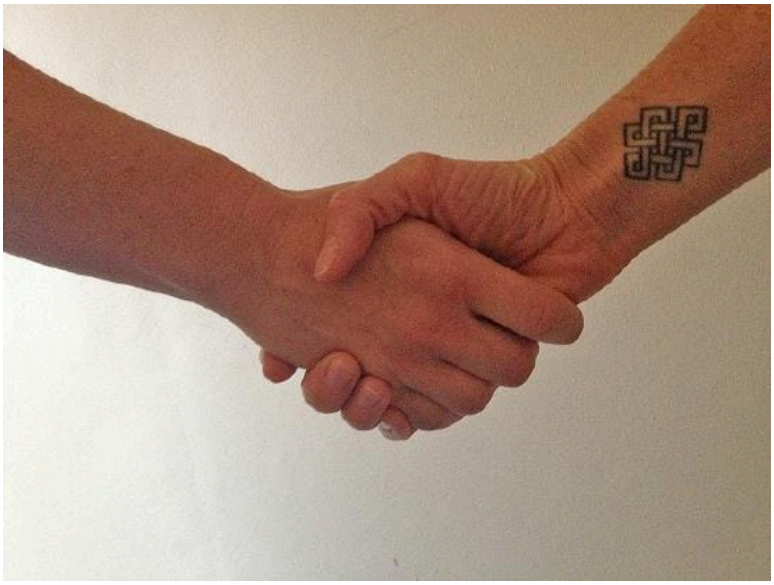


Figure 6.2.3 Compromising may help conflicting parties come to a resolution, but neither may be completely satisfied if they each had to give something up. Broad Bean Media – handshake – CC BY-SA 2.0.

A negative of compromising is that it may be used as an easy way out of a conflict. The compromising style is most effective when both parties find the solution agreeable. Rosa and D'Shaun could decide that Casey's allowance does need to be increased and could each give ten more dollars a week by committing to taking their lunch to work twice a week instead of eating out. They are both giving up something, and if neither of them have a problem with taking their lunch to work, then the compromise was equitable. If the couple agrees that the twenty extra dollars a week should come out of D'Shaun's golf budget, the compromise isn't as equitable, and D'Shaun, although he agreed to the compromise, may end up with feelings of resentment. Wouldn't it be better to both win?

Collaborating

The collaborating style involves a high degree of concern for self and other and usually indicates investment in the conflict situation and the relationship. Although the collaborating style takes the most work in terms of communication competence, it ultimately leads to a win/win situation in which neither party has to make concessions because a mutually beneficial solution is discovered or created. The obvious advantage is that both parties are satisfied, which could lead to positive problem solving in the future and strengthen the overall relationship. For example, Rosa and D'Shaun may agree that Casey's allowance needs to be increased and may decide to give her twenty more dollars a week in exchange for her babysitting her little brother one night a

week. In this case, they didn't make the conflict personal but focused on the situation and came up with a solution that may end up saving them money. The disadvantage is that this style is often time consuming, and only one person may be willing to use this approach while the other person is eager to compete to meet their goals or willing to accommodate. It also isn't possible in all situations. There are times when there simply just aren't enough resources for everyone to "win."

Here are some tips for collaborating and achieving a win/win (Hargie, 2011):

- Do not view the conflict as a contest you are trying to win.
- Remain flexible and realize there are solutions yet to be discovered.
- Distinguish the people from the problem (don't make it personal).
- Determine what the underlying needs are that are driving the other person's demands (needs can still be met through different demands).
- Identify areas of common ground or shared interests that you can work from to develop solutions.
- Ask questions to allow them to clarify and to help you understand their perspective.
- Listen carefully and provide verbal and nonverbal feedback.

Culture and Conflict

Conflict management styles are shaped by culture, and research shows that the five classic styles—competing, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising—were developed with a Western bias (Oetzel, Garcia, & Ting-Toomey, 2008). For example, while avoiding is often described as a negative "lose/lose" strategy in the West, people in the U.S., Germany, China, and Japan have also seen avoidance as a way of showing concern for others. To better understand these differences, it is useful to consider the role of **face** in conflict.

Face and Facework

"Saving face" means protecting one's image or avoiding embarrassment. In communication, **face** is the self we present to others, and **facework** refers to strategies we use to maintain, repair, or challenge face—our own or someone else's. According to **face negotiation theory** (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003), people in all cultures engage in facework, but cultural values shape whether we focus more on protecting self-face or other-face.

A major influence is the distinction between **individualistic** and **collectivistic** cultures.

- Individualistic cultures (e.g., the U.S., most of Europe) emphasize independence, competition, and self-expression.
- Collectivistic cultures (e.g., China, Japan, Peru, Vietnam) emphasize group identity, harmony, and social norms.

At the individual level, **self-construal** also matters. People with **independent self-construals** see themselves as unique individuals and tend to prioritize self-face. Those with **interdependent self-construals** see themselves as connected to others and prioritize other-face.

Facework and Conflict Styles

Face concerns influence conflict strategies:

- **Accommodating** – giving in (other-face concern).
- **Avoiding** – sidestepping conflict (other-face concern).
- **Competing** – defending or persuading (self-face concern).
- **Collaborating** – apologizing, discussing privately, remaining calm (other-face concern).

Research shows that students in Germany, Japan, China, and the U.S. with independent self-construals were more likely to compete, while those with interdependent self-construals were more likely to avoid or collaborate (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Collectivistic cultures generally favor avoiding or accommodating to protect relationships, while individualistic cultures are more likely to compete to protect self-face.

For example, an American might confront criticism directly to defend their reputation, while a Japanese communicator might avoid conflict to prevent embarrassment or protect group harmony. Yet, even among collectivistic cultures, differences exist—expressing emotion may threaten other-face in Japan but not in China.

Conclusion

Culture adds important layers to conflict management, shaping whether people focus more on protecting self-face or other-face and which strategies they prefer. While general patterns exist across individualistic and collectivistic cultures, we should be cautious about overgeneralizing since individuals and subgroups often differ. The more we learn from cultural differences, the more competent and adaptable we become as communicators.

Handling Conflict Better

Conflict is inevitable in all relationships, but it is not necessarily negative. What matters is not whether conflict occurs, but how it is managed. Developing communication competence means recognizing your own patterns of conflict, understanding what triggers your negative reactions, and working to respond in more constructive ways.

Research has identified four common triggers for conflict: criticism, demands, cumulative annoyance, and rejection. Criticism can spark conflict even when not intended that way. A remark about someone's appearance, for instance, might be meant as an observation but taken as a personal attack. Demands also cause conflict, especially when phrased harshly or viewed as unfair. Cumulative annoyance builds slowly over repeated frustrations until it finally erupts, often in ways that surprise the other person. Rejection is particularly painful, since it taps into our vulnerability; when efforts to show care or affection are ignored or dismissed, people often respond with anger to mask hurt.

Patterns of conflict also matter. Serial arguing—ongoing disputes over the same issue—may develop repeating cycles, growing hostility, or in some cases reassurance of commitment despite disagreement. Recognizing these patterns helps us intervene before they damage relationships. One effective way to deescalate conflict is through validation. This does not mean agreeing with the other person, but showing that you are listening and taking their perspective seriously. Simple acts like maintaining eye contact, nodding, or offering short acknowledgments can reduce defensiveness and open space for dialogue.

It is important to remember that not everyone you encounter will have strong conflict management skills. But often it takes only one competent communicator to shift a conflict toward a healthier outcome. Relationship success depends less on how many conflicts occur and more on how those conflicts are managed. A thoughtful, respectful response can make the difference between escalation and resolution.

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6.3: Emotions and Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define emotions.
- Explain the evolutionary and cultural connections to emotions.
- Discuss how we can more effectively manage our own and respond to others' emotions.

Emotions are deeply personal, but they are also social. Our feelings often show through facial expressions, tone, or behavior, whether we want them to or not. At the same time, other people's emotions trigger responses in us—comfort when a friend cries, or discomfort when a stranger does. Because emotions are central to relationships, understanding how they work helps us respond to others more effectively.

Emotions can be understood as physiological, behavioral, and communicative reactions to stimuli that we process cognitively (Planlap, Fitness, & Fehr, 2006). They begin with internal changes such as a racing heart or tense stomach. These may remain private, but they often spill over into behavior—like fidgeting when nervous—or into direct expression through words and nonverbal cues. Expressing emotion provides others with information about how to respond, such as offering support when someone appears sad. We learn, through socialization, how to display and interpret emotions, though some people develop this skill more effectively than others.

Researchers distinguish between **primary** and **secondary** emotions. Primary emotions—joy, distress, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust—are innate, short-lived, and universally recognized across cultures. Even people with no exposure to Western culture, such as members of a remote New Guinea tribe, correctly identified facial expressions of these emotions (Evans, 2001).

Secondary emotions—such as love, guilt, shame, embarrassment, pride, envy, and jealousy—are more complex. They require higher-level thinking, develop over time, and last longer. Unlike primary emotions, they do not have universal facial expressions and are shaped by culture and relationships. For instance, you might feel guilt over a hurtful comment, or embarrassment at the thought of stumbling during a presentation. Because these emotions involve more reflection, they can be managed, making emotional awareness a key part of communication competence. While cultures vary in how they interpret and express emotions, both primary and secondary emotions are human universals. Far from being distractions, emotions help us survive, connect, and make meaning in our lives.

Perspectives on Emotion

How did you learn to express your emotions? Like many aspects of communication and interaction, you likely never received any formal instruction on expressing emotions. Instead, we learn through observation, trial and error, and through occasional explicit guidance (e.g., "boys don't cry" or "smile when you meet someone"). To better understand how and why we express our emotions, we'll discuss the evolutionary function of emotions and how they are affected by social and cultural norms.

Evolution and Emotions

Humans survived and thrived as a species by forming social bonds, and our ability to manage emotions like anger and show empathy helped strengthen those bonds (Planlap, Fitness, & Fehr, 2006). Emotional regulation helps reduce conflict, and empathy helps us connect with others, which became more important as societies grew more complex.

Attachment theory explains that humans are born with a natural drive to bond with caregivers. This instinct developed through evolution, as babies who formed strong attachments were more likely to survive and pass on their genes. Based on early interactions with caregivers, people tend to develop one of three attachment styles: **secure**, **avoidant**, or **anxious** (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000). While the theory often assumes parents are the primary caregivers, others—like extended family or foster parents—can also play that role. And as caregiving roles shift, men now more often take on this responsibility.

- **Securely attached** people describe their childhood as loving and stable. They're comfortable with closeness, trust others, and manage their emotions well, even in tough times like a breakup.
- **Avoidant** individuals are uncomfortable with intimacy and often fear emotional closeness. They may fall in love quickly, but feelings fade just as fast. This can come from a lack of strong early bonding.
- **Anxious** people crave closeness but fear abandonment. They often feel insecure, experience emotional ups and downs, and may blame others for not committing. This style may come from inconsistent or unreliable caregiving.

These early attachment patterns shape our emotional experiences—how we feel love, trust, anxiety, or anger—and influence how we relate to others throughout life. A securely attached child may feel the same warmth and trust in adult relationships, while an anxious child may bring those same fears and insecurities into future bonds. While we can't control the attachment style we develop as children, we can learn to better manage our emotions and improve our communication as adults through self-awareness and practice.

Culture and Emotions

While all humans share some emotional similarities, the way we experience and express emotions varies across cultures. Emotional "scripts"—like how we fall in love—are shaped by history, culture, and society. For example, Westerners often value falling in love as the basis for marriage, but arranged marriages are still common in many cultures and were once common in the West too. Even though shared values and social support often lead to more successful relationships than passion alone, Western culture still emphasizes love and emotion in dating and marriage (Crozier, 2006).

Cultural norms, called **display rules**, guide how we show emotions. These rules tell us which emotions are okay to express, how strongly, and in front of whom. In **individualistic cultures** (like the U.S.), people are encouraged to express emotions openly, even strongly, because it reflects personal freedom. In **collectivistic cultures**, emotions are seen more as part of social relationships. People may hold back emotions to protect group harmony and avoid embarrassing others, since emotions reflect not just the individual but also their family or community (Safdar et al., 2009).

Expressing Emotions

When we feel something strongly—happy, sad, excited, or upset—we often want to talk about it. This is called **emotion sharing**. The stronger the emotion, the more likely we are to talk about it, which helps us feel better and connect with others (Rime, 2007).

Sharing emotions builds relationships by making us feel supported. But emotions can also spread to others, a process called **emotional contagion** (Hargie, 2011). For example, one person's laughter or bad mood can affect a whole group. A funny example is the "Debbie Downer" skit on *Saturday Night Live*, where one character's negativity affects everyone's mood—until laughter takes over the whole cast and audience.

To express emotions clearly, it helps to use specific words. Instead of saying "I'm sad," you might say "I feel hurt" or "I feel overwhelmed." This helps others better understand how you feel. Also, using "I" statements (like "I feel frustrated") instead of blaming others ("You're making me crazy") makes conversations smoother and less likely to cause conflict.

We also share emotions through writing—texts, emails, and messages. This can be useful for thinking things through, but it can also be tricky. Without tone or facial expressions, feelings can be misunderstood. And waiting for a reply when you're upset can make things harder.



Figure 6.3.1 Breakdown

Managing and Responding to Emotions

Emotional intelligence became widely recognized in the early 1990s and has since gained attention in academics, business, education, and the media. It involves recognizing and understanding emotions—both your own and others'—and using that awareness to guide your thoughts and actions (Salovey, Woolery, & Mayer, 2001). Developing a strong emotional vocabulary and knowing when and how to express feelings helps improve emotional awareness, which is the first step. The next step is applying that awareness to how we think and behave.

Just as we often share emotions after an emotional event, we also receive others' emotional sharing. A part of emotional intelligence is being able to understand and respond to others' emotions. **Empathy**—the ability to understand and feel others' emotions—is key. Expressing empathy helps build supportive relationships, which can reduce stress, improve mood, and increase life satisfaction (Guerrero & Andersen, 2000).

People share emotions for different reasons: to seek support, get advice, or simply to be heard. They may also want to celebrate happy emotions. When someone shares, you're likely to feel some of their emotion too. Your response—verbal or nonverbal—depends on the intensity. Mild emotions often just need words of support. For stronger emotions, like grief, a hug may say more than words. Responding with care strengthens your communication skills and deepens relationships.

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6.4: Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define self-disclosure.
- Explain the connection between social penetration theory, social comparison theory, and self-disclosure.
- Discuss the process of self-disclosure, including how we make decisions about what, where, when, and how to disclose.
- Explain how self-disclosure affects relationships.

Have you ever said too much on a first date? At a job interview? To a professor? Have you ever posted something on Facebook only to return later to remove it? When self-disclosure works out well, it can have positive effects for interpersonal relationships. Conversely, self-disclosure that does not work out well can lead to embarrassment, lower self-esteem, and relationship deterioration or even termination. As with all other types of communication, increasing your competence regarding self-disclosure can have many positive effects.

So what is self-disclosure? It could be argued that any verbal or nonverbal communication reveals something about the self. The clothes we wear, a laugh, or an order at the drive-through may offer glimpses into our personality or past, but they are not necessarily self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is purposeful disclosure of personal information to another person. If I purposefully wear the baseball cap of my favorite team to reveal my team loyalty to a new friend, then this clothing choice constitutes self-disclosure. Self-disclosure doesn't always have to be deep to be useful or meaningful. Superficial self-disclosure, often in the form of "small talk," is key in initiating relationships that then move onto more personal levels of self-disclosure. Telling a classmate your major or your hometown during the first week of school carries relatively little risk but can build into a friendship that lasts beyond the class.

Theories of Self-Disclosure

Social penetration theory states that as we get to know someone, we engage in a reciprocal process of self-disclosure that changes in breadth and depth and affects how a relationship develops. *Depth* refers to how personal or sensitive the information is, and *breadth* refers to the range of topics discussed (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). You may recall Shrek's declaration that ogres are like onions in the movie *Shrek*. While certain circumstances can lead to a rapid increase in the depth and/or breadth of self-disclosure, the theory states that in most relationships people gradually penetrate through the layers of each other's personality like we peel the layers from an onion.



Figure 6.4.1 Helena Jacoba – Red Onion close up – CC BY 2.0.

The next theory of self-disclosure that we will discuss is the **Johari Window**, which is named after its creators Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (Luft, 1969). The Johari window can be applied to a variety of interpersonal interactions in order to help us understand what parts of ourselves are open, hidden, blind, and unknown. To help understand the concept, think of a window with four panes. As you can see in Figure 6.2 "Johari Window", one axis of the window represents things that are known to us, and the other axis represents things that are known to others. The upper left pane contains open information that is known to us and to others. The amount of information that is openly known to others varies based on relational context. When you are with close friends, there is probably a lot of information already in the open pane, and when you are with close family, there is also probably a lot of information in the open pane. The information could differ, though, as your family might know much more about your past and your friends more about your present. Conversely, there isn't much information in the open pane when we meet someone for the first time, aside from what the other person can guess based on our nonverbal communication and appearance.

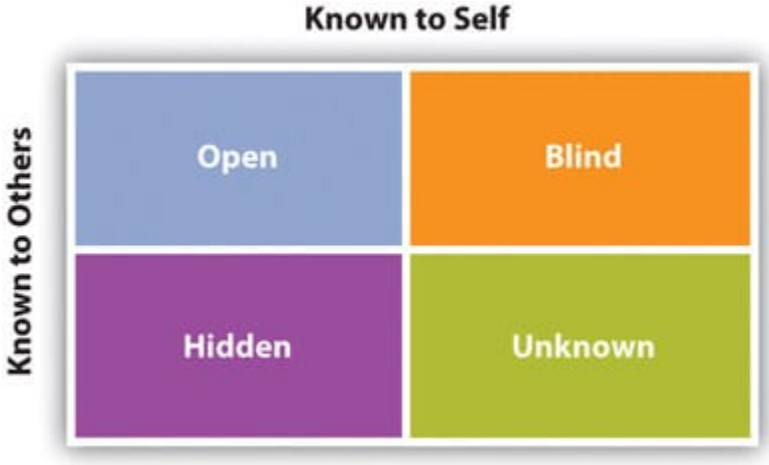


Figure 6.4.2: Johari Window Source: Joseph Luft, Of Human Interaction (Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books, 1969).

The bottom left pane contains hidden information that is known to us but not to others. As we are getting to know someone, we engage in self-disclosure and move information from the "hidden" to the "open" pane. By doing this, we decrease the size of our hidden area and increase the size of our open area, which increases our shared reality. The reactions that we get from people as we open up to them help us form our self-concepts and also help determine the trajectory of the relationship. If the person reacts favorably to our disclosures and reciprocates disclosure, then the cycle of disclosure continues and a deeper relationship may be forged.

The upper right pane contains information that is known to others but not to us. For example, we may be unaware of the fact that others see us as pushy or as a leader. Looking back to self-discrepancy theory from Chapter 2 "Self-Communication and Perception", we can see that people who have a disconnect between how they see themselves and how others see them may have more information in their blind pane. Engaging in perception checking and soliciting feedback from others can help us learn more about our blind area.

The bottom right pane represents our unknown area, as it contains information not known to ourselves or others. To become more self-aware, we must solicit feedback from others to learn more about our blind pane, but we must also explore the unknown pane. To discover the unknown, we have to get out of our comfort zones and try new things. We have to pay attention to the things that excite or scare us and investigate them more to see if we can learn something new about ourselves. By being more aware of what is contained in each of these panes and how we can learn more about each one, we can more competently engage in self-disclosure and use this process to enhance our interpersonal relationships.

The Process of Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is when you share personal information with someone, like your experiences, thoughts, feelings, or needs. It's a

big part of building trust and connection in relationships, but deciding to open up isn't always simple. You have to think about what to say, when to say it, and who you're saying it to. Usually, we start by sharing simple things—like what we've done or what we think—and gradually move toward deeper stuff, like our emotions or what we really need. Sometimes, though, people open up quickly, especially in intense situations or with someone they don't expect to see again.

There are lots of reasons we might choose to share or stay quiet. We might open up because we need support, want to feel better, or hope to strengthen a relationship. On the other hand, we might hold back to avoid embarrassment, rejection, or just because it doesn't feel like the right moment. Timing matters—a good moment to talk can help things go well, while bad timing can make even a thoughtful message fall flat. How we share also makes a difference. Face-to-face conversations feel more personal and allow for emotional feedback, but they can also be intimidating. Texts or messages give you more control over your words but lack the emotional cues that come from tone or body language.

Sometimes, self-disclosure just happens without much planning—maybe someone asks a direct question or shares something personal first. If you're not ready to open up in return, that's okay. Being a good listener and showing support can be just as meaningful.

Effects of Disclosure on the Relationship

The self-disclosure process is circular: you share something, the other person reacts, and you interpret their reaction. How they respond depends a lot on *why* they think you shared. If they attribute your disclosure to your personality (a dispositional attribution), they might judge you as friendly or attention-seeking. If they blame the situation (a situational attribution), they might think, "She only said that because we're on our lunch break." And if they link it to your relationship (an interpersonal attribution), they'll feel honored you trusted *them* with that information—and that usually brings you closer together.

But being the keeper of someone's secret can be tough. You might feel pressured to "unload" it on someone else—sometimes for good reasons (like asking for advice) and sometimes just to feel important. Unfortunately, studies show many people break confidences to look powerful or in-the-know, which can seriously damage trust.

When self-disclosure goes well—when the listener reacts supportively and keeps your confidence—it boosts intimacy, self-worth, and even physical health. People who talk through their most painful experiences generally report less stress, feel more supported, and enjoy better overall well-being.

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7: COMMUNICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS

7.1: Foundations of Relationships

7.2: Communication and Friends

7.3: Communication and Families

7.4: Romantic Relationships

7.5: Relationships at Work

7.6: The Dark Side of Relationships

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7.1: Foundations of Relationships

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish between personal and social relationships.
- Describe stages of relational interaction.
- Discuss social exchange theory.

We can begin to classify key relationships we have by distinguishing between our personal and our social relationships (VanLear, Koerner, & Allen, 2006). Personal relationships meet emotional, relational, and instrumental needs, as they are intimate, close, and interdependent relationships such as those we have with best friends, partners, or immediate family. Social relationships are relationships that occasionally meet our needs and lack the closeness and interdependence of personal relationships. Examples of social relationships include coworkers, distant relatives, and acquaintances. Another distinction useful for categorizing relationships is whether or not they are voluntary. For example, some personal relationships are voluntary, like those with romantic partners, and some are involuntary, like those with siblings. Likewise, some social relationships are voluntary, like those with acquaintances, and some are involuntary, like those with neighbors or distant relatives. You can see how various relationships fall into each of these dimensions in Figure 1 "Types of Relationships". Now that we have a better understanding of how we define relationships, we'll examine the stages that most of our relationships go through as they move from formation to termination.

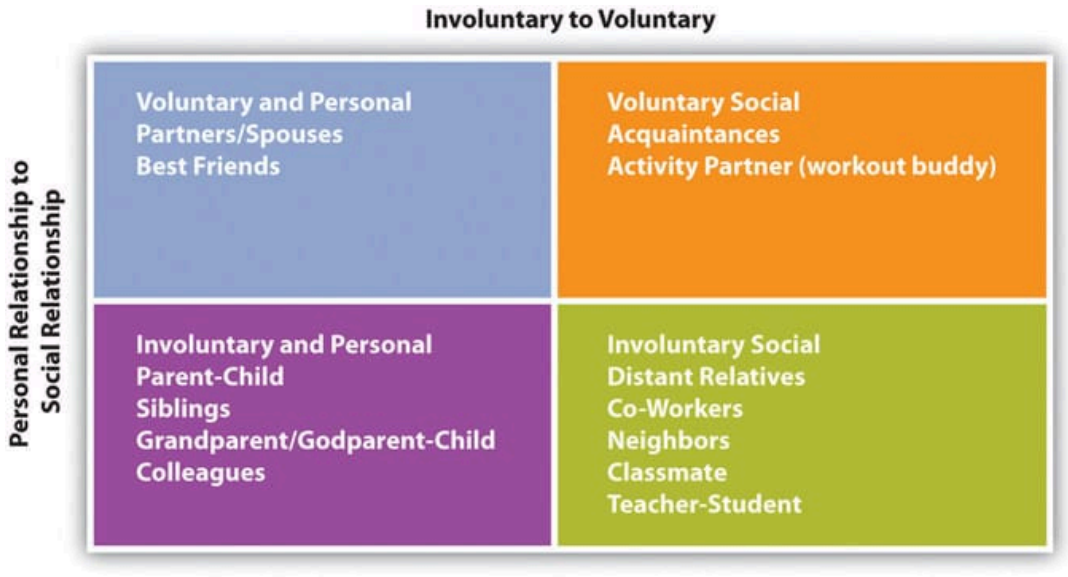


Figure 7.1.1: Types of Relationships

Source: Adapted from C. Arthur VanLear, Ascan Koerner, and Donna M. Allen, "Relationship Typologies," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 95.

Stages of Relational Interaction

Communication is at the heart of forming our interpersonal relationships. It is through our communication that we adapt to the dynamic nature of our relational worlds, given that relational partners do not enter each encounter or relationship with compatible expectations. Communication allows us to test and be tested by our potential and current relational partners. It is also through communication that we respond when someone violates or fails to meet those expectations (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009).

There are ten established stages of interaction that can help us understand how relationships come together and come apart

(Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). We will discuss each stage in more detail, but in Table 7.1 "Relationship Stages" you will find a list of the communication stages. We should keep the following things in mind about this model of relationship development: relational partners do not always go through the stages sequentially, some relationships do not experience all the stages, we do not always consciously move between stages, and coming together and coming apart are not inherently good or bad. As we have already discussed, relationships are always changing—they are dynamic. Although this model has been applied most often to romantic relationships, most relationships follow a similar pattern that may be adapted to a particular context.

Table 7.1.1: Relationship Stages

Process	Stage	Representative Communication
Coming Together	Initiating	"My name's Rich. It's nice to meet you."
	Experimenting	"I like to go to raves. What about you?"
	Intensifying	"I feel like we've gotten a lot closer over the past couple months."
	Integrating	(To friend) "We just opened a joint bank account."
	Bonding	"I can't wait to tell my parents that we decided to move in together!"
Coming Apart	Differentiating	"I'd really like to be able to hang out with my friends sometimes."
	Circumscribing	"Don't worry about problems I'm having at work. I can deal with it."
	Stagnating	(To self) "I don't know why I even asked him to go out to dinner. He never wants to go out and have a good time."
	Avoiding	"I have a lot going on right now, so I probably won't be home as much."
	Terminating	"It's important for us both to have some time apart. I hope you'll be fine."

Source: Adapted from Mark L. Knapp and Anita L. Vangelisti, *Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 34.

Initiating

In the initiating stage, people size each other up and try to present themselves favorably. Whether you run into someone in the hallway at school or in the produce section at the grocery store, you scan the person and consider any previous knowledge you have of them, expectations for the situation, and so on. Initiating is influenced by several factors.

If you encounter a stranger, you may say, "Hi, my name's Rachel." If you encounter a person you already know, you've already gone through this before, so you may just say, "What's up?" Time constraints also affect initiation. A quick passing calls for a quick hello, while a scheduled meeting may entail a more formal start. If you already know the person, the length of time that's passed since your last encounter will affect your initiation. For example, if you see a friend from high school while home for winter break, you may set aside a long block of time to catch up; however, if you see someone at work that you just spoke to ten minutes earlier, you may skip initiating communication. The setting also affects how we initiate conversations, as we communicate differently at a crowded bar than we do on an airplane. Even with all this variation, people typically follow typical social scripts for interaction at this stage.

Experimenting

The experimenting stage of a relationship is like a first test run—people exchange basic info to move from strangers to acquaintances. It's similar to animals sniffing each other out: casual chats about where you're from, your major, or shared interests like sports. If the conversation flows, it might lead to a connection. If it stalls or feels awkward, it's often a sign not to pursue it further.

This stage doesn't just happen with new people—it continues in ongoing relationships, too. Small talk is a big part of it, whether it's catching up with your parents during a visit or chatting with a partner while cooking dinner. Even though it can feel forced or superficial (like when someone talks to you at the gym even though you have earbuds in), small talk has value. It helps break the ice, tests compatibility, and builds a sense of connection. Interestingly, research shows that many of our relationships never

move beyond this stage—and that's okay.

Intensifying

As we enter the intensifying stage, we indicate that we would like or are open to more intimacy, and then we wait for a signal of acceptance before we attempt more intimacy. This incremental intensification of intimacy can occur over a period of weeks, months, or years and may involve inviting a new friend to join you at a party, then to your place for dinner, then to go on vacation with you. In the intensifying stage, relationships grow closer through small, gradual steps—like hanging out more, sharing personal info, or doing favors for each other. People may use nicknames, inside jokes, or say "we" instead of "I," showing a deeper connection. Sharing space or belongings can also signal growing trust. But if things move too fast or feel one-sided, the relationship can become strained. Navigating this stage carefully can lead to a stronger, more integrated bond.

Integrating

In the integrating stage, two people's identities and personalities merge, and a sense of interdependence develops. Even though this stage is most evident in romantic relationships, there are elements that appear in other relationship forms. Some verbal and nonverbal signals of the integrating stage are when the social networks of two people merge; those outside the relationship begin to refer to or treat the relational partners as if they were one person (e.g., always referring to them together—"Let's invite Olaf and Bettina"); or the relational partners present themselves as one unit (e.g., both signing and sending one holiday card or opening a joint bank account). Even as two people integrate, they likely maintain some sense of self by spending time with friends and family separately, which helps balance their needs for independence and connection.

Bonding

The bonding stage includes a public ritual that announces formal commitment. These types of rituals include weddings, commitment ceremonies, and civil unions. Obviously, this stage is almost exclusively applicable to romantic couples. In some ways, the bonding ritual is arbitrary, in that it can occur at any stage in a relationship. In fact, bonding rituals are often later annulled or reversed because a relationship doesn't work out, perhaps because there wasn't sufficient time spent in the experimenting or integrating phases. However, bonding warrants its own stage because the symbolic act of bonding can have very real effects on how two people communicate about and perceive their relationship. For example, the formality of the bond may lead the couple and those in their social network to more diligently maintain the relationship if conflict or stress threatens it.



Figure 7.1.2 Pixabay – public domain.

Differentiating

Individual differences can present a challenge at any given stage in the relational interaction model; however, in the differentiating stage, communicating these differences becomes a primary focus. Differentiating is the reverse of integrating, as *we* and *our* reverts back to *I* and *my*. People may try to reset boundaries in their life prior to the integrating of the current relationship, including other relationships or possessions. For example, Carrie may reclaim friends who became "shared" as she got closer to her roommate Julie and their social networks merged by saying, "I'm having *my friend*s over to the apartment and would like to have privacy for the evening." Differentiating may onset in a relationship that bonded before the individuals knew each other in enough depth and breadth. Even in relationships where the bonding stage is less likely to be experienced, such as a friendship, unpleasant discoveries about the other person's past, personality, or values during the integrating or experimenting stage could lead a person to begin differentiating.

Circumscribing

To circumscribe means to draw a line around something or put a boundary around it (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011). So in the circumscribing stage, communication decreases and certain areas or subjects become restricted as individuals verbally close themselves off from each other. They may say things like "I don't want to talk about that anymore" or "You mind your business and I'll mind mine." If one person was more interested in differentiating in the previous stage, or the desire to end the relationship is one-sided, verbal expressions of commitment may go unechoed—for example, when one person's statement, "I know we've had some problems lately, but I still like being with you," is met with silence. Passive-aggressive behavior and the demand-withdrawal conflict pattern, which we discussed in Chapter 6 may occur more frequently in this stage. If there is an increase in boundaries and a decrease in communication becomes a pattern, the relationship further deteriorates toward stagnation.

Stagnating

During the stagnating stage, the relationship may come to a standstill, as individuals basically wait for the relationship to end. Outward communication may be avoided, but internal communication may be frequent. The relational conflict flaw of mindreading takes place as a person's internal thoughts lead them to avoid communication. For example, a person may think, "There's no need to bring this up again, because I know exactly how he'll react!" This stage can be prolonged in some relationships. Parents and children who are estranged, couples who are separated and awaiting a divorce, or friends who want to end a relationship but don't know how to do it may have extended periods of stagnation. Short periods of stagnation may occur right after a failed exchange in the experimental stage, where you may be in a situation that's not easy to get out of, but the person is still there.

Avoiding

Moving to the avoiding stage may be a way to end the awkwardness that comes with stagnation, as people signal that they want to close down the lines of communication. Communication in the avoiding stage can be very direct—"I don't want to talk to you anymore"—or more indirect—"I have to meet someone in a little while, so I can't talk long." While physical avoidance such as leaving a room or requesting a schedule change at work may help clearly communicate the desire to terminate the relationship, we don't always have that option. In a parent-child relationship, where the child is still dependent on the parent, or in a roommate situation, where a lease agreement prevents leaving, people may engage in cognitive dissociation, which means they mentally shut down and ignore the other person even though they are still physically present.

Terminating

The terminating stage can happen early or after many years together. It may be caused by distance, growing apart, or changes in values. Breakups often include a summary of the relationship, an explanation for ending it, and a message about growing apart. People may also talk about what comes next and whether they'll stay in touch. These kinds of conversations reflect how relationships evolve and how people decide whether the connection is still worth the effort.

Social Exchange Theory

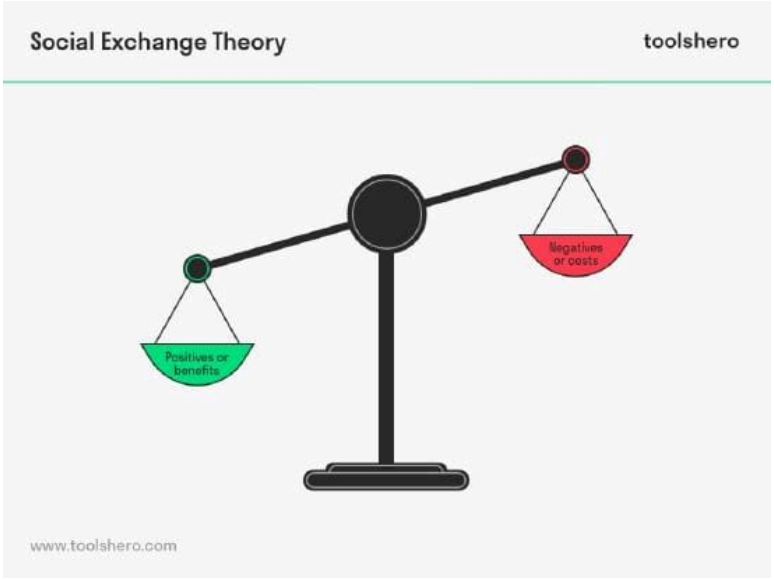


Figure 7.1.3 Cost-Rewards Scale

Social exchange theory essentially entails a weighing of the costs and rewards in a given relationship (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006). Rewards are outcomes that we get from a relationship that benefit us in some way, while costs range from granting favors to providing emotional support. When we do not receive the outcomes or rewards that we think we deserve, then we may negatively evaluate the relationship, or at least a given exchange or moment in the relationship, and view ourselves as being underbenefited. In an equitable relationship, costs and rewards are balanced, which usually leads to a positive evaluation of the relationship and satisfaction.

Commitment and interdependence are important interpersonal and psychological dimensions of a relationship that relate to social exchange theory. Interdependence refers to the relationship between a person's well-being and involvement in a particular relationship. A person will feel interdependence in a relationship when (1) satisfaction is high or the relationship meets important needs; (2) the alternatives are not good, meaning the person's needs couldn't be met without the relationship; or (3) investment in the relationship is high, meaning that resources might decrease or be lost without the relationship (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006).

We can be cautioned, though, to not view social exchange theory as a tit-for-tat accounting of costs and rewards (Noller, 2006). We wouldn't be very good relational partners if we carried around a little notepad, notating each favor or good deed we completed so we can expect its repayment. As noted earlier, we all become aware of the balance of costs and rewards at some point in our relationships, but that awareness isn't persistent. We also have communal relationships, in which members engage in a relationship for mutual benefit and do not expect returns on investments such as favors or good deeds (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006). As the dynamics in a relationship change, we may engage communally without even being aware of it, just by simply enjoying the relationship. It has been suggested that we become more aware of the costs and rewards balance when a relationship is going through conflict (Noller, 2006). Overall, relationships are more likely to succeed when there is satisfaction and commitment, meaning that we are pleased in a relationship intrinsically or by the rewards we receive.

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7.2: Communication and Friends

Learning Objectives

- Compare and contrast different types of friendships.
- Describe the cycle of friendship from formation to maintenance to dissolution/deterioration.
- Discuss how friendships change across the life span, from adolescence to later life.
- Explain how culture and gender influence friendships.

Defining and Classifying Friends

Friendships are voluntary relationships between two people who usually see each other as equals and influence each other. Unlike family or romantic relationships, friendships don't have formal support and can feel more vulnerable. Still, in some cultures, friendships are very formal, like in parts of Thailand where people have ceremonies to show loyalty. Generally, people expect friends to listen, offer support, and have fun together.

There are three common types of friendships in adulthood. **Reciprocal friendships** are close and based on loyalty and commitment, often lasting despite distance or life changes. Associative friendships are more casual and based on convenience, like gym buddies who might lose touch if their routines change. **Receptive friendships** have a power difference, like a mentor and mentee, and can be helpful but sometimes tricky if authority is abused.

Another kind of friendship is **"friends with benefits" (FWB)**, where friends have sex without romantic commitment. Many college students have had these relationships. People may choose FWBs because they separate sex from love, while others avoid them for personal or religious reasons. FWB relationships can bring friends closer but also cause worries about hurt feelings or losing the friendship. Women often face harsher judgment for casual sex than men, but otherwise, men and women experience FWBs similarly.

Communication in FWBs can be challenging, especially figuring out labels and balancing the friendship and sexual parts. People often want the relationship to stay the same or turn romantic but usually wouldn't give up the sex to save the friendship. Privacy is also important since some friends might judge the relationship. FWBs may set ground rules about safer sex and other partners since these relationships are often not exclusive.

Friendships Across the Life Span

As we transition between life stages such as adolescence, young adulthood, emerging adulthood, middle age, and later life, our friendships change in many ways (Rawlins, 1992). Our relationships begin to deepen in adolescence as we negotiate the confusion of puberty. Then, in early adulthood, many people get to explore their identities and diversify their friendship circle. Later, our lives stabilize and we begin to rely more on friendships with a romantic partner and continue to nurture the friendships that have lasted. Let's now learn more about the characteristics of friendships across the life span.

Adolescence

Adolescence begins with the onset of puberty and lasts through the teen years. We typically make our first voluntary close social relationships during adolescence as cognitive and emotional skills develop. At this time, our friendships are usually with others of the same age/grade in school, gender, and race, and friends typically have similar attitudes about academics and similar values (Rawlins, 1992). These early friendships allow us to test our interpersonal skills, which affects the relationships we will have later in life. For example, emotional processing, empathy, self-disclosure, and conflict become features of adolescent friendships in new ways and must be managed (Collins & Madsen, 2006).

Adolescents begin to see friends rather than parents as providers of social support, as friends help negotiate the various emotional situations often experienced for the first time (Collins & Madsen, 2006).



Figure 7.2.1: Friendships in adolescence become important as we begin to create an identity that is separate from our family. Japharl – Family – CC BY 2.0.

This new dependence on friendships can also create problems. For example, as adolescents progress through puberty and forward on their identity search, they may experience some jealousy and possessiveness in their friendships as they attempt to balance the tensions between their dependence on and independence from friends. Additionally, as adolescents articulate their identities, they look for acceptance and validation of self in their friends, especially given the increase in self-consciousness experienced by most adolescents (Rawlins, 1992). Those who do not form satisfying relationships during this time may miss out on opportunities for developing communication competence, leading to lower performance at work or school and higher rates of depression (Collins & Madsen, 2006). .

Early Adulthood

Early adulthood encompasses the time from around eighteen to twenty-nine years of age, and although not every person in this age group goes to college, most of the research on early adult friendships focuses on college students. Those who have the opportunity to head to college will likely find a canvas for exploration and experimentation with various life and relational choices relatively free from the emotional, time, and financial constraints of starting their own family that may come later in life (Rawlins, 1992).

As we transition from adolescence to early adulthood, people report that their friendships are more intimate than the ones they had in adolescence. During this time, friends provide important feedback on self-concept, careers, romantic and/or sexual relationships, and civic, social, political, and extracurricular activities. It is inevitable that young adults will lose some ties to their friends from adolescence during this transition, which has positive and negative consequences. Investment in friendships from adolescence provides a sense of continuity during the often rough transition to college. These friendships may also help set standards for future friendships, meaning the old friendships are a base for comparison for new friends. Obviously this is a beneficial situation relative to the quality of the old friendship. If the old friendship was not a healthy one, using it as the standard for new friendships is a bad idea. Additionally, nurturing older friendships at the expense of meeting new people and experiencing new social situations may impede personal growth during this period.

Adulthood

Adult friendships span a larger period of time than the previous life stages discussed, as adulthood encompasses the period from thirty to sixty-five years old (Rawlins, 1992). The exploration that occurs for most middle-class people in early adulthood gives way to less opportunity for friendships in adulthood, as many in this period settle into careers, nourish long-term relationships, and have children of their own. These new aspects of life bring more time constraints and interpersonal and task obligations, and with these obligations comes an increased desire for stability and continuity. Adult friendships tend to occur between people

who are similar in terms of career position, race, age, partner status, class, and education level. Therefore, finding friends through religious affiliation, neighborhood, work, or civic engagement is likely to result in similarity between friends (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992).

Even as social networks narrow, adults are also more likely than young adults to rely on their friends to help them process thoughts and emotions related to their partnerships or other interpersonal relationships (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). For example, a person may rely on a romantic partner to help process through work relationships and close coworkers to help process through family relationships. Work life and home life become connected in important ways, as career (money making) intersects with and supports the desires for stability (home making) (Rawlins, 1992). In situations where family isn't close by, adults' close or best friends may adopt kinship roles, and a child may call a parent's close friend "Uncle Andy" even if they are not related. There is not much research on friendships in late middle age (ages fifty to sixty-five), but it has been noted that relationships with partners may become even more important during this time. Partners who have successfully navigated their middle age may feel a bonding sense of accomplishment with each other and with any close friends with whom they shared these experiences (Rawlins, 1992).

Later Life

Friendships in later-life adulthood, which begins in one's sixties, are often remnants of previous friends and friendship patterns. Those who have typically had a gregarious social life will continue to associate with friends if physically and mentally able, and those who relied primarily on a partner, family, or limited close friends will have more limited, but hopefully equally rewarding, interactions. Friendships that have extended from adulthood or earlier are often "old" or "best" friendships that offer a look into a dyad's shared past. Given that geographic relocation is common in early adulthood, these friends may be physically distant, but if investment in occasional contact or visits preserved the friendship, these friends are likely able to pick up where they left off (Rawlins, 1992).



Figure 7.2.2: Although stereotypes of the elderly often present them as slow or out of touch, many people in later life enjoy the company of friends and maintain active social lives. Felipe Neves – 3 old friends – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Obviously, our physical and mental abilities affect our socializing and activities and vary widely from person to person and age to age. Mobility may be limited due to declining health, and retiring limits the social interactions one had at work and work-related events (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). People may continue to work and lead physically and socially active lives decades past the marker of later life, which occurs around age sixty-five. Regardless of when these changes begin, it is common and normal for our opportunities to interact with wide friendship circles to diminish as our abilities decline. Early later life may be marked by a transition to partial or full retirement if a person is socioeconomically privileged enough to do so. For health or personal reasons, some in later life live in assisted-living facilities. Later-life adults in these facilities may make friends based primarily on proximity, just as many college students in early adulthood do in the similarly age-segregated environment of a residence hall (Rawlins, 1992).

Friendships in later life provide emotional support that is often only applicable during this life stage. For example, given the general stigma against aging and illness, friends may be able to shield each other from negative judgments from others and help each other maintain a positive self-concept (Rawlins, 1992). Friends can also be instrumental in providing support after the death of a partner. Men, especially, may need this type of support, as men are more likely than women to consider their spouse their sole confidante, which means the death of the wife may end a later-life man's most important friendship. Women who lose a partner also go through considerable life changes, and in general more women are left single after the death of a spouse than men due to men's shorter life span and the tendency for men to be a few years older than their wives. Given this fact, it is not surprising that widows in particular may turn to other single women for support. Overall, providing support in later life is important given the likelihood of declining health. In the case of declining health, some may turn to family instead of friends for support to avoid overburdening friends with requests for assistance. However, turning to a friend for support is not completely burdensome, as research shows that feeling needed helps older people maintain a positive well-being (Rawlins, 1992).

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7.3: Communication and Families

Learning Objectives

- Compare and contrast the various definitions of family.
- Describe various types of family rituals and explain their importance.
- Explain how conformity and conversation orientations work together to create different family climates.

There is no doubt that the definition and makeup of families are changing in the United States. New data from research organizations and the 2010 US Census show the following: people who choose to marry are waiting longer, more couples are cohabitating (living together) before marriage or instead of marrying, same-sex marriages are finally legal and increasing, households with more than two generations are increasing, and the average household size is decreasing (Pew Research Center, 2010). Just as the makeup of families changes, so do the definitions.

Defining Family

There are three main ways people define family: by structure, by tasks, and by communication. Structural definitions focus on who is related by birth, marriage, or adoption and often who lives together. For example, a father and son living together fit this, but a couple who isn't married or a single person living alone might not. This kind of definition helps with things like government data but can leave out many family types. More recent definitions include diverse family forms.

Family of origin means your biological or legal relatives, like parents and siblings. Family of orientation means the people you live with and choose as family, like a spouse or children. Different types of families include nuclear families (married parents and kids), single-parent families, stepfamilies, cohabiting couples, and same-sex couples, some with children and some without.

But is family about structure or behavior? Functional definitions say family is about the roles people play—like providing support, care, and teaching social skills—regardless of biology. Sometimes, someone not related by blood is considered family because of how much they care and support. Transactional definitions focus on communication and feelings—family is about creating a sense of home, loyalty, and shared identity. Someone might provide basic needs but not make you feel at home. Since family combines structure, function, and communication, it's hard to have one single definition. It's better to see family as a mix of these elements.

Family Communication Processes

As children, most of us spend much of our time talking to parents, grandparents, and siblings. As we become adolescents, our peer groups become more central, and we may even begin to resist communicating with our family during the rebellious teenage years. However, as we begin to choose and form our own families, we once again spend much time engaging in family communication. Family communication is our primary source of intergenerational communication, or communication between people of different age groups.

Family Interaction Rituals

You may have heard or used the term *family time* in your own families. What does *family time* mean? As was discussed earlier, relational cultures are built on interaction routines and rituals. Families also have interaction norms that create, maintain, and change communication climates. The notion of family time hasn't been around for too long but was widely communicated and represented in the popular culture of the 1950s (Daly, 2001). When we think of family time, or *quality time* as it's sometimes called, we usually think of a romanticized ideal of family time spent together.



Figure 7.3.1: The nuclear family was the subject of many television shows in the 1950s that popularized the idea of family time. Wikimedia Commons – CC BY 2.0.

Families engage in a variety of rituals that demonstrate symbolic importance and shared beliefs, attitudes, and values. Three main types of relationship rituals are patterned family interactions, family traditions, and family celebrations (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Patterned family interactions are the most frequent rituals and do not have the degree of formality of traditions or celebrations. Patterned interactions may include mealtime, bedtime, receiving guests at the house, or leisure activities. Mealtime rituals may include a rotation of who cooks and who cleans, and many families have set seating arrangements at their dinner table. My family has recently adopted a new leisure ritual for family gatherings by playing corn hole (also known as bags). While this family activity is not formal, it's become something expected that we look forward to.

Family traditions are more formal, occur less frequently than patterned interactions, vary widely from family to family, and include birthdays, family reunions, and family vacations. Birthday traditions may involve a trip to a favorite restaurant, baking a cake, or hanging streamers. Family reunions may involve making t-shirts for the group or counting up the collective age of everyone present.

Last, family celebrations are also formal, have more standardization between families, may be culturally specific, help transmit values and memories through generations, and include rites of passage and religious and secular holiday celebrations. Thanksgiving, for example, is formalized by a national holiday and is celebrated in similar ways by many families in the United States. Rites of passage mark life-cycle transitions such as graduations, weddings, quinceañeras, or bar mitzvahs. While graduations are secular and may vary in terms of how they are celebrated, quinceañeras have cultural roots in Latin America, and bar mitzvahs are a long-established religious rite of passage in the Jewish faith.



Figure 7.3.2 Family Togetherness

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7.4: Romantic Relationships

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the influences on attraction and romantic partner selection.
- Discuss the differences between passionate, companionate, and romantic love.
- Explain how social networks affect romantic relationships.
- Explain how sexual orientation and race and ethnicity affect romantic relationships.

As we have learned, communication is the primary means by which we communicate emotion, and it is how we form, maintain, and end our relationships. In this section, we will explore the communicative aspects of romantic relationships including love, sex, social networks, and cultural influences.

Relationship Formation and Maintenance

Research often separates romantic relationships into premarital and marital couples, but because relationships now vary widely, it's clearer to think of dating, cohabitating, and partnered couples. Dating includes the courtship period, which can last from one date to several years. Cohabitating couples live together, while partnered couples have made a formal commitment through words, ceremony, or legally.

Many factors influence how we choose romantic partners, including family background, values, physical attraction, and communication styles. Attachment theory explains how the bond we form with caregivers as children affects our adult relationships. Teens with strong, reliable relationships with their parents often have healthier romantic connections later.

Values around relationships have changed over time. For example, chastity and skills like cooking used to be very important in choosing partners, but today love and mutual attraction top the list. Physical attraction remains important, but being a good communicator—both verbally and nonverbally—also makes someone more attractive.

For relationships to work long-term, couples need to share similar interests and agree on roles like chores and finances. Couples who match in these areas tend to have less conflict and stronger bonds.



Figure 7.4.1 Hand Holding

Love and Sexuality in Romantic Relationships

When we think of romantic relationships, we often think of love. But until recently, love wasn't always needed for marriage. In some cultures, marriages are still arranged for family status or financial gain. Today, love usually doesn't lead directly to a relationship since most people don't end up with their first love. Love varies in intensity and is important in how we connect with others.

There are two main types of love: passionate and companionate. Passionate love is intense and exciting but can also bring anxiety or pain. Companionate love is a deep affection based on shared life and stability. Relationships based only on passion may not last unless that passion turns into companionate love. Still, some passion is important to keep a relationship exciting. Passionate love usually involves sexuality, while companionate love can also be found in friendships and family.

Sexual compatibility is important in romantic relationships. Differences in sexual history or attitudes can affect attraction. Sexual satisfaction is linked to relationship satisfaction—couples who are happy sexually often feel more love and security. But sexual activity isn't the only factor; communication about sex is just as important. Talking openly about sexual preferences, boundaries, or decisions (like waiting to have sex) helps couples avoid conflicts. Sexual conflicts often arise from disagreements about sex or jealousy.

Overall, love and sexuality both play key roles in romantic relationships.

Romantic Relationships and Social Networks

Social networks influence all our relationships but have gotten special attention in research on romantic relations. Romantic relationships are not separate from other interpersonal connections to friends and family. Is it better for a couple to share friends, have their own friends, or attempt a balance between the two? Overall, research shows that shared social networks are one of the strongest predictors of whether or not a relationship will continue or terminate.

Network overlap refers to the number of shared associations, including friends and family, that a couple has (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). For example, if Dan and Shereece are both close with Dan's sister Bernadette, and all three of them are friends with Kory, then those relationships completely overlap (Figure 1).

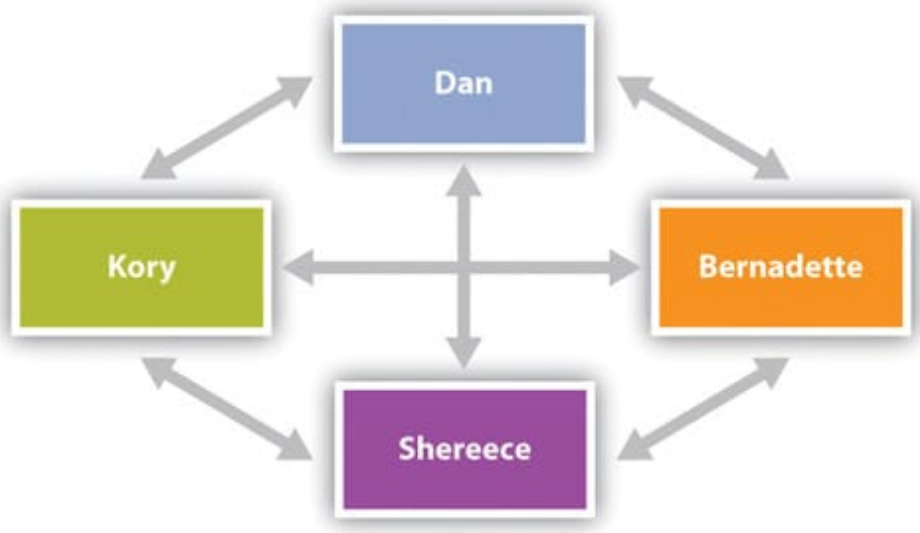


Figure 7.4.2: Social Network Overlap

Network overlap creates some structural and interpersonal elements that affect relational outcomes. In general, having more points of connection to provide instrumental support through the granting of favors or emotional support in the form of

empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help a couple manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000).

In addition to providing a supporting structure, shared associations can also help create and sustain a positive relational culture. For example, mutual friends of a couple may validate the relationship by discussing the partners as a “couple” or “pair” and communicate their approval of the relationship to the couple separately or together, which creates and maintains a connection (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). Being in the company of mutual friends also creates positive feelings between the couple, as their attention is taken away from the mundane tasks of work and family life.

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7.5: Relationships at Work

Learning Objectives

- List the different types of workplace relationships.
- Describe the communication patterns in the supervisor-subordinate relationship.
- Describe the different types of peer coworker relationships.
- Evaluate the positives and negatives of workplace romances.

Although some careers require less interaction than others, all jobs require interpersonal communication skills. Shows like *The Office* and *Halt and Catch Fire* offer glimpses into the world of workplace relationships. These examples often highlight the dysfunction that can occur within a workplace. Since many people spend as much time at work as they do with their family and friends, the workplace becomes a key site for relational development. The workplace relationships we'll discuss in this section include supervisor-subordinate relationships, workplace friendships, and workplace romances (Sias, 2009).

Supervisor-Subordinate Relationships

Workplace relationships between supervisors and subordinates are common due to hierarchy. These relationships can be based on mentoring, friendship, or romance, but they come with unique communication challenges.

Supervisors provide important information, especially to new employees, which creates an imbalance since supervisors have more power. They also give feedback, but often avoid negative feedback, which can harm the relationship and job performance.

Employees tend to view supervisors more positively when they share gender or race, and prefer older supervisors for their experience. Trust in a supervisor's ability can improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover. Good supervisor relationships can also lead to mentoring, where supervisors guide employees' career growth. Mentoring can be formal or informal and often lasts beyond daily job duties, sometimes continuing even if the mentee moves to a new job or location.

Workplace Friendships

Workplace relationships vary from casual greetings to close friendships. Proximity helps form these relationships, but not all coworkers become friends. Similar interests and self-disclosure help deepen workplace bonds. Most coworker relationships are between peers—people with equal authority—and come in three types:

- **Information peers:** Talk mainly about work, with little personal sharing.
- **Collegial peers:** Share some personal info and offer emotional support.
- **Special peers:** Close friendships with deep trust and support, like family.

Work friendships help reduce stress, increase job satisfaction, and lower turnover, but can also lead to gossip or keeping unhappy employees in place for the sake of friendship.

Romantic relationships at work are common but controversial. They can boost satisfaction and productivity but also cause problems like favoritism or blurred boundaries between attraction and harassment. People enter workplace romances for different reasons: career benefits, ego boosts, or genuine love.

Companies handle workplace romances differently—some ban them, others require disclosure via "love contracts," and some even encourage dating, like Southwest Airlines. The debate over workplace romances continues, balancing personal freedom with professional concerns.



Figure 7.5.1 Fist Bump

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7.6: The Dark Side of Relationships

Learning Objectives

- Define the dark side of relationships.
- Explain how lying affects relationships.
- Explain how sexual and emotional cheating affects relationships.
- Define the various types of interpersonal violence and explain how they are similar and different.

What constitutes the dark side of relationships? There are two dimensions of the dark side of relationships: one is the degree to which something is deemed acceptable or not by society; the other includes the degree to which something functions productively to improve a relationship or not (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). These dimensions become more complicated when we realize that there can be overlap between them, meaning that it may not always be easy to identify something as exclusively light or dark.

Some communication patterns may be viewed as appropriate by society but still serve a relationally destructive function. Our society generally presumes that increased understanding of a relationship and relational partner would benefit the relationship. However, numerous research studies have found that increased understanding of a relationship and relational partner may be negative. In fact, by avoiding discussing certain topics that might cause conflict, some couples create and sustain positive illusions about their relationship that may cover up a darker reality. Despite this, the couple may report that they are very satisfied with their relationship. In this case, the old saying “ignorance is bliss” seems appropriate. Likewise, communication that is presumed inappropriate by society may be productive for a given relationship (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). For example, our society ascribes to an ideology of openness that promotes honesty. However, as we will discuss more next, honesty may not always be the best policy. Lies intended to protect a relational partner (called altruistic lies) may net an overall positive result improving the functioning of a relationship.

Lying

Lying isn’t always bad in relationships. Sometimes we lie to protect someone’s feelings. Research shows that only about a quarter of people think total honesty is necessary for a successful relationship, so lying is a common part of communication. We tend to lie more when a relationship is new, like on a first date, to make a good impression—about our personality, past, or skills. These lies might be small exaggerations, and people often get away with them because they don’t know each other well.

We also tell “altruistic lies” to spare others’ feelings, like complimenting a friend’s bad painting or pretending to like a meal. These lies can keep peace but might hurt the other person if they rely on false praise. As relationships get closer, we lie less and often just avoid certain topics instead. Sometimes we answer vaguely to hide the truth. When we do lie outright, we may need to tell more lies to keep the story straight. We’re only a little better than chance at spotting lies, but couples who know each other well detect lies more easily. Still, closeness can make us trust and believe our partners even when they might be lying. Finding out about lies can hurt feelings, damage trust, and harm the relationship.

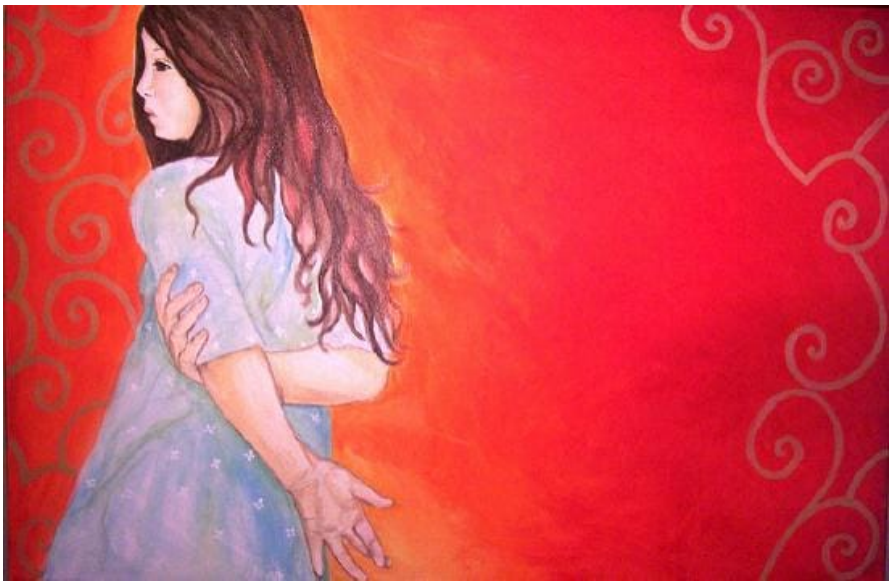


Figure 7.6.1: Some lies are meant to protect someone or make someone feel better. Pamela Jackson – crossed fingers – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Anger and Aggression

We only have to look at some statistics to get a startling picture of violence and aggression in our society: 25 percent of workers are chronically angry; 60 percent of people experience hurt feelings more than once a month; 61 percent of children have experienced rejection at least once in the past month; 25 percent of women and 16 percent of men have been stalked; 46 percent of children have been hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped in the past month; and nearly two million people report being the victim of workplace violence each year (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Occupational Safety and Healthy and Safety Administration, 2011). Violence and abuse definitely constitute a dark side of interpersonal relationships. Even though we often focus on the physical aspects of violence, communication plays an important role in contributing to, preventing, and understanding interpersonal violence. Unlike violence that is purely situational, like a mugging, interpersonal violence is constituted within ongoing relationships, and it is often not an isolated incident (Johnson, 2006). Violence occurs in all types of relationships, but our discussion focuses on intimate partner violence and family violence.

Many people experience anger, hurt feelings, rejection, and violence at work or home. Violence in relationships isn't just physical—it often involves ongoing patterns of abuse and control.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) happens between romantic partners and comes in three types:

- **Intimate terrorism** is when one partner uses violence and control to dominate the other, including emotional abuse and isolating them.
- **Violent resistance** is when the abused partner fights back but isn't trying to control.
- **Situational couple violence** happens due to specific conflicts, without a goal of control.

Most intimate terrorism is men abusing women, while violent resistance is usually women defending themselves. Situational violence is more common and less about control. Child abuse is another major issue, with many cases yearly. Abusive parents often misinterpret children's behavior and respond harshly, harming their self-esteem and causing fear. Children can also be abusive toward parents, especially teenagers, though this is less reported. Psychological abuse, like insults, control, and threats, is very common and can be more damaging than physical abuse. It harms mental health, causing depression, anxiety, and other serious issues. Overall, communication plays a big role in both causing and preventing violence in relationships.

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8: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

8.1: Intercultural Communication Overview
8.2: Intercultural Identity
8.3: Discussing Intercultural Communication
8.4: Belonging
8.5: How Scholars Study Intercultural Communication

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8.1: Intercultural Communication Overview

Learning Objectives

- Define Intercultural Communication
- Explore the "global village"

What is Intercultural Communication? If you were to ask Russel Arent, author of *Bridging the Cultural Gap* he would tell you that, “Intercultural Communication is the sending and receiving of messages across languages and cultures. It is also a negotiated understanding of meaning in human experiences across social systems and societies.” This provides not only a concise definition but it also describes the importance that understanding has in intercultural interactions.

In this TedTalkX, Pellegrino Riccardi, a man who spent 27 years traveling the world to experience different cultures, refers to culture as, “A system of behavior that helps us act in an accepted or familiar way.”

In efforts to explain the world’s population to young children, David J. Smith asks children to imagine the world as a small village so they can understand the vast population figures in a more comprehensible way. In 2016, the world’s population was 7.5 billion (Smith 7). Instead of talking about numbers of this magnitude, he represents the world as 100 people. Using Smith’s model, we can examine what nationalities make up the world’s population, what languages they speak, how old they are, and how wealth and education are globally distributed.

Here are some interesting facts from Smith’s global village, including the most recent update from: 100People.org, a website dedicated to keeping this idea alive! If the world were made up of 100 people:

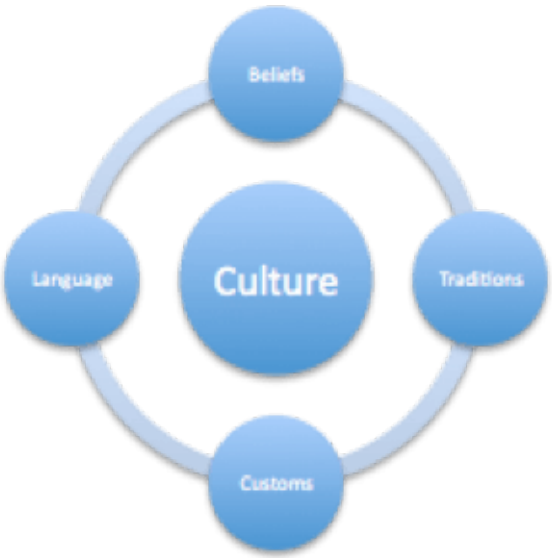
- 50 would be female
- 50 would be male
- 25 would be children
- 75 would be adults,
- 9 of whom would be 65 and older

There would be:

- 60 Asians
- 16 Africans
- 14 people from the Americas
- 10 Europeans
- 31 Christians
- 23 Muslims
- 16 people who would not be aligned with a religion
- 15 Hindus
- 7 Buddhists
- 8 people who practice other religions
- 12 would speak Chinese
- 6 would speak Spanish
- 5 would speak English
- 4 would speak Hindi
- 3 would speak Arabic
- 3 would speak Bengali
- 3 would speak Portuguese
- 2 would speak Russian

- 2 would speak Japanese
- 60 would speak other languages
- 86 would be able to read and write; 14 would not
- 7 would have a college degree
- 40 would have an Internet connection
- 78 people would have a place to shelter them from the wind and the rain, but 22 would not
- 80 would live in substandard housing
- 50 would be malnourished and 1 dying of starvation
- 33 would be without access to a safe water supply
- 39 would lack access to improved sanitation
- 24 would not have any electricity
- 48 would live on less than US$ 2 a day
- 20 would live on less than US$ 1 a day

To see a large scale of diversity around the world check out **World Diversity Patterns**!



If each villager earned a similar annual income, each one would have $10,300 per year. Instead, the richest 10 people in the village earn more than $87,500 a year, the poorest 10 villagers earn less than $2 a day, while the remaining 80 earn somewhere in between. As the average annual cost of food and shelter in the village is more than $5,000, many people go without these basic necessities (Smith 22).

Moreover, the people with less money are also less likely to have electricity and education. Besides simple cultural differences such as language or food preferences, cultural identity impacts individuals' accessibility to certain resources such as shelter, electricity, running water, health care, education, and political and legal systems.

If we return to the United States from our look at the global village (Moore):

- 25 percent of black youth ages 16-19 and 11 percent of 20-24 year olds are neither in school nor working. Compare this to 11 and 6 percent of their white peers. (E-16. Unemployment)
- Black infants have double the infant mortality rate than white infants in the US. (CDC)
- Black levels of unemployment have been roughly twice those of white since 1954 (E-16. Unemployment.)
- Women hold 102 seats in Congress (Women in Congress.)
- 475 of the top 500 companies are run by men (Fortune.)
- Women's earnings average 81 cents for every $1 earned by men (Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

- The United States is one of the few countries in the world that puts to death both the mentally retarded and children. The other five countries in the world that execute their children are Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.

Think about culture and communication as a reciprocal process: culture affects communication and communication affects culture. Both work together to shape how we identify as belonging to one culture or another, how we feel about belonging to a particular cultural group, how we communicate with other cultural groups, and how that group is regarded in the larger social system. As you will see, this is often a reflection of the language used to refer to a particular group of people, or the relative value placed on their communication practices. In the U.S., political and economic power is not equally distributed among cultures. We can see this power imbalance reflected in various linguistic practices such as the dominance of English, terms used to refer to different groups of people, and lack of bilingual signs or documents.

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8.2: Intercultural Identity

Learning Objectives

- Understand different dimensions of culture including:
  - Race
  - Ethnicity
  - Social Class
  - Ability
- Discuss intersectionality

Before going any further, let us spend some time discussing what we mean by culture. When you began reading this chapter what did you think we meant by the word culture? Your answer probably had something to do with people from different countries or of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. You are right—to a certain degree. Culture does include race, nationality, and ethnicity, but goes beyond those identity markers as well. The following are various aspects of our individual identity that we use to create membership with others to form a shared cultural identity: race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and social class. In addition to explaining the above identities, we will also discuss ethnocentrism, privilege, advantage, disadvantage, power, whiteness, co-culture, and political correctness as these terms are relevant to understanding the interplay between communication and culture.

When we talk about **culture** we are referring to belief systems, values, and behaviors that support a particular ideology or social arrangement. Culture guides language use, appropriate forms of dress, and views of the world. The concept is broad and encompasses many areas of our lives such as the role of the family, individual, educational systems, employment, and gender.

Understanding Race

Race is often difficult to talk about, not because of the inherent complexity of the term itself, but because of the role that race plays in society. Race is what we call a loaded word because it can bring up strong emotions and connotations. Understandings of race fall into two camps: a biological versus a sociopolitical construction of what it means to belong to a particular racial group. A **biological** construction of race claims that "pure" races existed and could be distinguished by such physical features as eye color and shape, skin color, and hair. Moreover, these differences could be traced back to genetic differences. This theory has been debunked by numerous scientists and been replaced with the understanding that there are greater genetic differences within racial groups, not between them. In addition, there is no scientific connection with racial identity and cultural traits or behaviors.

Instead of biology, we draw on a **sociopolitical** understanding of what it means to be of a particular race. This simply means that it is not a person's DNA that places them into a particular racial grouping, but all of the other factors that create social relations—politics, geography, or migration. We can also examine the reality that the meanings of race have changed across time and space. As dramatized in the 2002 film, "Gangs of New York," the Irish were once considered a minority with little social or political status. Now, being Irish in America is considered part of the general majority group, white or Caucasian. Noting the change from the biological to the sociopolitical understanding, we refer to race as "a largely social—yet powerful— construction of human difference that has been used to classify human beings into separate value-based categories" (Orbe and Harris 9).



Figure 8.2.1 Sign Carrying

Related to race are three other distinct concepts: **racial prejudice**, **racial discrimination**, and **racism**. **Racial prejudice** refers to the practice of holding false or negative beliefs of one racial group for the purpose of making another racial group (usually one's own) appear superior or normative**. Racial discrimination** is the outward manifestation of racial prejudice: it is when people act upon their negative beliefs about other races when communicating or setting policy**.** Note, it is possible to be prejudiced without acting upon those beliefs and that all races can discriminate against other races. The final concept, racism, combines racial prejudice with social power. **Racism** is institutional, rather than individual, meaning it occurs in large institutional contexts such as the representations of particular groups within media or the fact that racial minorities do not have equal access to educational or legal opportunities (Orbe & Harris 10). Racism often involves the unequal accessibility to resources and power.

Where Do You Come From?

Two other concepts that are often confused with race are ethnicity and nationality. **Ethnicity** refers to a person's or people's heritage and history, and involves shared cultural traditions and beliefs**.** A person may identify as Asian-American racially while their ethnicity is Chinese. **Nationality** refers to a people's nation-state of residence or where they hold citizenship**.** Most often nationality is derived from the country where one was born, but on occasion people give up their citizenship by birth and migrate to a new country where they claim national identity. For example, an individual could have been born and raised in another country but once they migrate to the United States and have American citizenship, their nationality becomes American.

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Are you male or female? Do you identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered? One's gender and sexual orientation are two additional ways to think about culture. Gender is discussed in more detail in Chapter 13, but for now think of it as the recognition that one is male, female, or androgynous. **Gender** is part of culture in that every society has particular gender roles and expectations for males and females. For example, in the United States, it is considered normal for the female gender to wear makeup, while it is often considered inappropriate for a male to do so. However, in some Native American tribes it was customary for the males to adorn themselves with paint for hunting and ceremonial rituals.



Figure 8.2.2 Family on the Beach

Sexual orientation refers to a person's preference for sexual or romantic relationships; one may prefer a partner of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both. Sexual orientation influences one's worldview or politics because while all societies include members who identify as gay or lesbian, these members do not always receive the same social or health benefits as heterosexual couples. However, this is changing. As of 2015, the Supreme Court of the Unites States made gay marriage legal in all 50 states. On top of these specific benefits, those with a nondominant sexual orientation might still have to contend on a daily basis that some people think they are deviant or somehow less than heterosexual people and couples. This may result in strained family relationships or discrimination in the workplace.

The Role of Money

You are probably familiar with the concept of class—what do the labels working class, middle-class, and upper-class bring to mind? Money? Economic standing is only one variable that influences class or socioeconomic standing. As the label suggests, one's socioeconomic status is influenced by monetary and social factors. In essence, socioeconomic standing is "your understanding of the world and where you fit in; it's composed of ideas, behaviors, attitudes, values, and language; class is how you think, feel, act, look, dress, talk, move, walk" (Langston 101). For example, in some middle class families children are expected to go to college just as their parents and grandparents had done. It may also be expected for the children to attend reasonably priced state colleges and universities as opposed to Ivy League Universities, which may be the norm in many upper-class families.

By now you are probably able to think of some other identity markers that shape a person's culture or worldview. How about spirituality or religion, profession, hobbies, political persuasion, age, abilities? These too are aspects of cultural identity. Spend some time thinking about how these aspects would influence a person's culture as we have done above.

Ability

Another aspect shaped and influenced by culture is ability and disability. Different societies value particular ways of thinking, moving, and communicating, which influences how disability is understood and accommodated in interaction. **Ableism** refers to beliefs and practices that privilege certain abilities while marginalizing disabled people. In intercultural communication, this can appear in language, interactional norms, and institutional expectations that assume a narrow idea of "normal." An intercultural perspective encourages inclusive, flexible communication that recognizes ability as a form of human diversity rather than deficit.

Intersectionality

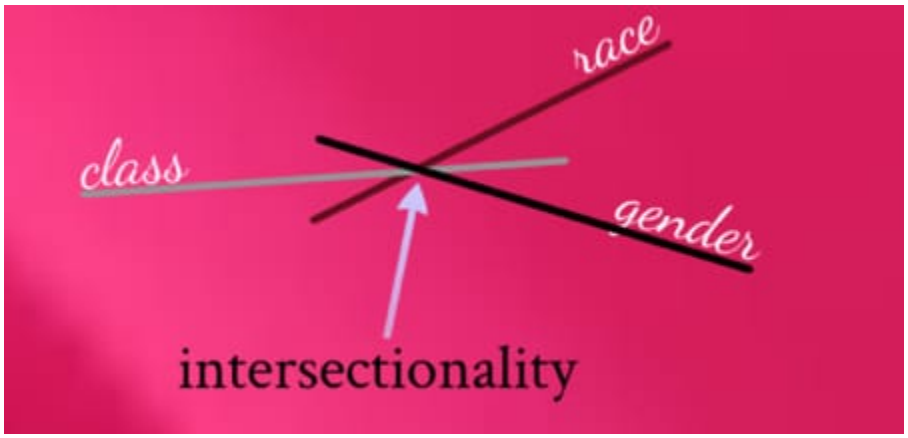


Figure 8.2.3 Intersectionality Diagram

Individuals cannot look simply at race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ability, disability, religion, and social class in isolation. Instead, we must look at identity as a combination of these. Cultural identities have many parts that all factor into an individual's identity. Intersectionality is the theory that shows how multiple systems of power and oppression operate on individuals in various degrees that directly corresponds to their identity (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality was a theory articulated by Kimberle Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate, in the late 1980's. A United States citizen and a Burmese citizen both growing up in modern times will not have equal opportunities. One might think that the US citizen will have more opportunities based on national privilege. But if the Burmese citizen is from a higher socioeconomic class than the American, the Burmese individual may have more opportunities. Other factors such as race, sexuality and ability also play into how many and which opportunities will be available.

Another example from Kimberle Crenshaw from her 1989 journal article Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics states: *"Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. . . . But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm."*

> Intersectionality is important for intercultural communication because individuals must realize not only the duality but the depth of identities. This theory is useful for critical analysis because it illuminates the different ways systems of oppression overlap and how systems of privilege and oppression can manifest simultaneously on an individual (Allen, 2010). It is easy for people to assume because they are one thing that is it their whole identity, just like not every feminist's agenda is the same and not every Syrian's views are the same. Intersectionality is a key to intercultural communication because it reminds individuals that systems of power although do not operate uniformly and effect how people will receive and transmit messages.

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8.3: Discussing Intercultural Communication

Learning Objectives

- Understand privilege
- Define ethnocentrism
- Consider stereotyping and bias
- Explain whiteness

Perhaps you may have noticed the theme of inequality as we have discussed topics like “unequal access to resources and benefits,” racial discrimination, and racism. You may have also thought, “oh, my, this is going to be a touchy chapter to read and discuss in class” or “this is interesting and relevant, but I feel uncomfortable talking about this as I don’t want to offend anyone.” These are very common and understandable reactions and ones we hear when we teach this subject matter. Hopefully, your instructor has set up a safe, open, and respectful classroom environment to facilitate such discussions. The fact that you are self-reflective of your feelings and how to express them to others is a great start! We too want you to be able to discuss this material both in and out of your class in a productive and self-reflective manner. To facilitate that goal we have included some additional concepts— privilege, ethnocentrism, whiteness, and political correctness—that are useful when considering your own cultural identity, your place in society, and your communication with others.

As it was so eloquently put by Carey W. James, ”I haven’t given up the quest, typically if idealistically American, for an open, nonascriptive basis of community life: one in which neighbors help one another out--you know, lend out the lawnmower, come to the funeral, take part in the town meeting-but do not ask one another too many questions about their private lives and pretty much ignore the color of skin, the shapes of noses and eyes, or the distribution of X/Y chromosomes.” This scholar is one of many people in the fight for political correctness to prevail.

Privilege

Hopefully, you have been thinking about your own cultural identity as you have been reading this chapter. If so, then you have been thinking about labels that define you culturally. Maybe you have defined yourself as female, Latina, and heterosexual. Or maybe you have labeled yourself as gay, white, working-class, and male. When we give ourselves labels such as these, often we ask ourselves, “Where do I fit in?” This is a good question to ask and demonstrates a recognition of the fact that you belong to more than one culture and that your cultures intersect in various ways. The most significant manifestation of these intersections is **power**—-the ability to influence others and control our lives. From the statistics given earlier in the chapter and from your own experiences, you should realize that some groups have more power than others. These people are what we refer to as the **dominant group:** white, male, Christian, middle-class, able-bodied, educated, and heterosexual. People whose cultural identities do not conform to this model are the **nondominant groups** and have less sociopolitical and economic power.

Peggy McIntosh uses the term **privilege** to refer to the power of dominant groups. She defines privilege as an invisible knapsack of advantages that some people carry around. They are invisible because they are often not recognized, seen as normative (i.e., “that’s just the way things are”), seen as universal (i.e., “everyone has them”), or used unconsciously. Below is a list of some of the privileges McIntosh identifies. Can you think of others?

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.

9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can deal with my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color, who constitute the world's majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over, or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me.
25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color that more or less match my skin.

McIntosh admits, “My perception is that colleges and universities are the main institutions that are raising awareness of the relationship between privilege and oppression, but that this awareness is needed throughout all public and private sectors of the United States; the ability to see privilege should be in the minds of all citizens” (195). As you think about privilege and the resulting advantages that some groups have over others, you should also keep in mind two facts. One, privilege is a relative concept that varies according to context. In some situations we may be more privileged than others, and in order to access some of that privilege one may decide to highlight or conceal parts of their identity. For example, unless a person tells you, you have no way of knowing their sexual orientation. Thus, a gay man might decide to “pass” as straight at a family reunion to avoid conflict from a heterosexist family. The fact that he can choose to pass as a straight man is also a form of privilege. A black woman cannot decide to pass as a white woman, for example. Two, we may have aspects of our identities that are simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged. The gay, white, working-class, male above is advantaged by the fact that he has light skin and is male, and is disadvantaged by the fact that he is gay and working-class.

Another example is from Nathan Pyle, a BuzzFeed staff member who wrote an article entitled, 10 Privileges I Have Complained About. Read the article and think about privileges you have complained about. Pyle states, “becoming self-aware of my privilege is a journey I’m still on.” Perhaps we should all start becoming self-aware of our privileges in America.

Watch this video, Students Learn A Powerful Lesson About Privilege

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Ethnocentrism

One of the first steps to communicating sensitively and productively about cultural identity is to be able to name and recognize one's identity and the relative privilege that it affords. Similarly important, is a recognition that one's cultural standpoint is not everyone's standpoint. Our views of the world, what we consider right and wrong, normal or weird, are largely influenced by our cultural position or standpoint: the intersections of all aspects of our identity. One common mistake that people from all cultures are guilty of is **ethnocentrism'**—*placing one's own culture and the corresponding beliefs, values, and behaviors in the center*. When we do this we view our position as normal and right, and evaluate all other cultural systems against our own.

Ethnocentrism shows up in small and large ways: the WWII Nazi's elevation of the Aryan race and the corresponding killing of Jews, Gypsies, gays and lesbians, and other non-Aryan groups is one of the most horrific ethnocentric acts in history. However, ethnocentrism shows up in small and seemingly unconscious ways as well. In American culture, if you decided to serve dog meat as an appetizers at your cocktail party you would probably disgust your guests and the police might even arrest you because the consumption of dog meat is not culturally acceptable. However, in China "it is neither rare nor unusual" to consume dog meat (Wingfield-Hayes). In the Czech Republic, the traditional Christmas dinner is carp and potato salad. Imagine how your U.S. family might react if you told them you were serving carp and potato salad for Christmas. In the Czech Republic, it is a beautiful tradition, but in America, it might not receive a warm welcome. Our cultural background influences every aspect of our lives from the food we consume to classroom curriculum.

Ethnocentrism may show up in Literature classes, for example, as cultural bias dictates which "great works" students are going to read and study. More often than not, these works represent the given culture (i.e., reading French authors in France and Korean authors in Korea). This ethnocentric bias has received some challenge in United States' schools, as teachers make efforts to create a multicultural classroom by incorporating books, short stories, and traditions from non-dominant groups. In the field of geography there has been an ongoing debate about the use of a Mercater map versus a Peter's Projection map. The arguments reveal cultural biases toward the Northern, industrialized nations. To see this bias, follow this link.

Case In Point

The Greenland Problem

The Mercator projection creates increasing distortions of size as you move away from the equator. As you get closer to the poles the distortion becomes severe. Cartographers refer to the inability to compare size on a Mercator projection as "the Greenland Problem." Greenland appears to be the same size as Africa, yet Africa's land mass is actually fourteen times larger. Because the Mercator distorts size so much at the poles it is common to crop Antarctica off the map. This practice results in the Northern Hemisphere appearing much larger than it really is. Typically, the cropping technique results in a map showing the equator about 60% of the way down the map, diminishing the size and importance of the developing countries.

Greenland is 0.8 million sq. miles and Africa is 11.6 million sq. miles, yet the often look roughly the same size on maps.

This was convenient, psychologically and practically, through the eras of colonial domination when most of the world powers were European. It suited them to maintain an image of the world with Europe at the center and looking much larger than it really was. Was this conscious or deliberate? Probably not, as most map users probably never realized the Eurocentric bias inherent in their world view. When there are so many other projections to choose from, why is it that today the Mercator projection is still such a widely recognized image used to represent the globe? The answer may be simply convention or habit. The inertia of habit is a powerful force.

Stereotyping and Bias

Closely related to ethnocentrism are **stereotyping** and **bias**, which also shape intercultural communication. Stereotypes are oversimplified generalizations about groups that ignore individual differences and reduce people to assumed traits. Thinking back to chapter 2 and the organization part of the perception process. Bias refers to attitudes or tendencies—often unconscious—that influence how we perceive, evaluate, and communicate with others.

Stereotypes and biases are learned through socialization, media, and cultural norms, and they often reinforce existing power structures by positioning some identities as "normal" and others as "different." Even when unintended, they can affect communication in subtle ways, such as assumptions about competence, credibility, or belonging. *Recognizing stereotypes and biases in ourselves is an important step toward more mindful, ethical, and effective intercultural communication.*

Whiteness

If you are White, how would you describe your culture? When we ask this question to our students we find that White students are often uncomfortable with the question, feel guilty about self-identifying as White, or claim that White people do not have a culture. Gordon Alley-Young says, "The invisibility of whiteness and white privilege for many people is what makes it difficult to name and thus to disrupt" (312). These sentiments have lead an increasing amount of scholars in a variety of disciplines such as Sociology, Women's Studies, Anthropology, English, as well as Communication to study the concept of Whiteness.

The above discussion about privilege and Whiteness is not meant to suggest that those people with sociopolitical privilege should feel ashamed or guilty. This is often a trap that people fall into and it can shut down important thinking and conversations about intercultural communication. We want everyone to realize that they have a racial identity and thus are an important part of improving race relations. Race relations is not just a subject that concerns minorities—-it concerns everyone as we all play a part and benefit whether consciously or unconsciously.

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8.4: Belonging

Learning Objectives

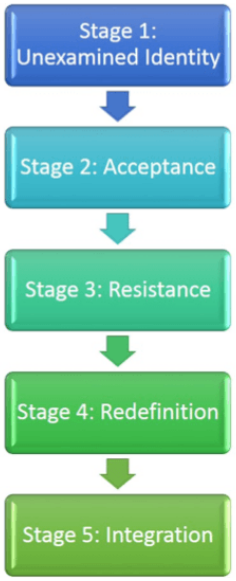
- Understand identity development
- Explore empathy in the context of intercultural communication

At this point, you are probably aware of the cultural groups to which you belong (i.e., "I am a Latino, middle-class, (almost) college-educated male"). Do you remember the process of coming to awareness of your cultural identity—when did you know you were white and what that meant? Was it during childhood, as a teenager, or reading this chapter? Has your understanding, or acceptance, of your racial heritage changed during the course of your lifetime? For most people it does. Just as Piaget organized the growth of children according to various stages of development, cultural scholars have similarly organized racial awareness along models and stages. Before explaining the various models, let us make a couple general comments about models. One, a model is not the thing it represents. Is the model car you played with as a child the same as the actual automobile? What were the differences? Size, time, maneuverability, details? These same kinds of differences exist between the model of racial identity development and the actual personal process. But just like the car model gives a fairly accurate picture of the actual automobile so do the racial identity models. Two, these models are general and not meant to fit perfectly to every individual's experience. With that said, let us examine the process of coming to an understanding of our racial identity.

To better understand this complex process, and in recognition of the above discussion regarding the distinctions in experiences for various cultural groups, we will present three racial identity models—-*Minority, Majority, and Bi-racial*.

Minority Identity Development

Because people who identify as members of a minority group in the United States tend to stand out or get noticed as "other" or "different," they also tend to become aware of their identity sooner than individuals who are part of the majority group. Since White is still considered normative in the United States, White people may take their identity, and the corresponding privilege, for granted. While we are using the following four stages of development to refer to racial and ethnic identity development, they may also be useful when considering other minority aspects of our identity such as gender, class, or sexual orientation (Ponterotto and Pendersen). Moreover, there is no set age or time period that a person reaches or spends in a particular stage, and not everyone will reach the final stage.



- **Stage 1: Unexamined Identity**. As the name of this stage suggests, the person in stage one of Phinney's model has little or no concern with ethnicity. They may be too young to pay attention to such matters or just not see the relationship between

racial identity and their own life. One may accept the values and beliefs of the majority culture even if they work against their own cultural group.

- **Stage 2: Conformity**. In stage two the individual moves from a passive acceptance of the dominant culture's value system to a more active one. They consciously make choices to assimilate or fit in with the dominant culture even if this means putting down or denying their own heritage. They may remain at this stage until a precipitating event forces them to question their belief system.
- **Stage 3: Resistance and Separation**. The move from stage two to stage three can be a difficult process as it necessitates a certain level of critical thinking and self-reflection. If you have ever tried to wrestle with aspects of your own belief system then you can imagine the struggle. The move may be triggered by a national event such as the case of "Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot and killed on August 9, by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, in Ferguson, MO (Buchanan). Learn more about the case here. It may be fostered on a more individual scale such as enrolling in a Women's Studies class and learning about the specifics of women's history in America. Martin Luther King Jr. moved to this stage around age six after the mother of King's White neighborhood friends told them that he could not play with her children anymore because he was Black. A person in this stage may simply reject all of their previously held beliefs and positive feelings about the dominant culture with those of their own group, or they may learn how to critically examine and hold beliefs from a variety of cultural perspectives, which leads to stage four.
- **Stage 4: Integration**. The final stage is one where the individual reaches an achieved identity. They learn to value diversity; seeing race, gender, class, and ethnic relations as a complex process instead of an either/or dichotomy. Their aim is to end oppression against all groups, not just their own.

Majority Identity Development

The following model was developed by Rita Hardiman in 1994 and contains some similarities with Phinney's minority identity development model.

- **Stage 1: Unexamined Identity**. This stage is the same for both minority and majority individuals. While children may notice that some of their playmates have different colored skin, they do not fear or feel superior to them.
- **Stage 2: Acceptance**. The move to stage two signals a passive or active acceptance of the dominant ideology—either way the individual does not recognize that he or she has been socialized into accepting it. When a White person goes the route of **passive acceptance** they have **no conscious awareness of being White although they may hold some subtly racist assumptions** such as "[p]eople of color are culturally different, whereas Whites are individuals with no group identity, culture, or shared experience of racial privilege." Or, White art forms are "classical" whereas works of art by people of color are considered "ethnic art," "folk art," or "crafts" (Martin and Nakayama 132). People in this stage may minimize contact with minorities or act in a "let me help you" fashion toward them. If a White person in this stage follows the active acceptance path then they are conscious of their White identity and may act in ways that highlight it. Refusing to eat food from other cultures or watch foreign films are examples of the active acceptance path of this stage.
- **Stage 3: Resistance**. Just as the move from stage two to stage three in the minority development model required a great deal of critical thought, so does this juncture. Here the members of the majority group cease blaming the members of minority groups for their conditions and see socioeconomic realities as a result of an unjust and biased sociopolitical system. There is an overall move from seeing one's station in life as a purely individual event or responsibility to a more systemic issue. Here, people may feel guilty about being White and ashamed of some historical actions taken by some White people, they may try to associate with only people of color, or they may attempt to exorcise aspects of White privilege from their daily lives.
- **Stage 4: Redefinition**. In this stage, people attempt to redefine what it means to be White without the racist baggage. They are able to move beyond White guilt and recognize that White people and people of all cultures contain both racist and nonracist elements and that there are many historical and cultural events of which White people can be proud.
- **Stage 5: Integration**. In the last phase individuals are able to accept their Whiteness or other majority aspects of their identity and integrate it into other parts of their lives. There is a simultaneous self-acceptance and acceptance of others.

Bi- or Multiracial Identity Development

Originally, people thought that bi-racial individuals followed the development model of minority individuals, but given that we now know that race and the meanings about race are socially constructed, it makes sense to realize that a person of mixed racial ancestry is likely to be viewed differently (from both the dominant culture and the individual's own culture) than a minority individual. Thus, they are likely to experience a social reality unique to their experience. The following five-stage model is derived from the work of W.S. Carlos Poston.

- **Stage 1: Personal Identity**. Poston's first stage is much like the unexamined identity stage in the previous two models. Again, children are not aware of race as a value-based social category and derive their personal identity from individual personality features instead of cultural ones.
- **Stage 2: Group Categorization**. In the move from stage one to two, the person goes from no racial or cultural awareness to having to choose between one or the other. In a family where the father is Black and the mother is Japanese, the child may be asked by members of both families to decide if he or she is Black or Japanese. Choosing both is not an option in this stage.
- **Stage 3: Enmeshment/Denial**. Following the choice made in stage two, individuals attempt to immerse themselves in one culture while denying ties to the other. This process may result in guilt or feelings of distance from the parent and family whose culture was rejected in stage two. If these feelings are resolved then the child moves to the next stage. If not, they remain here.
- **Stage 4: Appreciation**. When feelings of guilt and anger are resolved the person can work to appreciate all of the cultures that shape their identity. While there is an attempt to learn about the diversity of their heritage, they will still identify primarily with the culture chosen in stage two.
- **Stage 5: Integration**. In the fifth and final stage the once fragmented parts of the person's identity are brought together to create a unique whole. There is integration of cultures throughout all facets of the person's life—dress, food, holidays, spirituality, language, and communication.

Empathy

In the International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication (June 27th 2017), Benjamin Broom states that, "In intercultural situations, empathy is more complex and more difficult, but it is a key competency for effective intercultural communication." The author goes on to describe how empathy is an opportunity to try to imagine the life of another person. That being said, trying to understand the struggles of another is a first step to positive intercultural communication. Statement shirts or clothing such as, "I Can't Breathe" are attempting to convey a sense of empathy with the plight of African-American males in US society. Seeing another person wearing this shirt might be confusing if one does not ask about it in hope of understanding. Being sensitive to the potential underlying meaning of these kinds of cultural reference can lead to empathy.

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8.5: How Scholars Study Intercultural Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define high and low context cultures
- Understand speech styles in different cultures
- Explain collectivist vs individualist cultures

If you decide to take a class on intercultural communication you will learn a great deal about the similarities and differences across cultural groups. Since this chapter is meant to give you an overview or taste of this exciting field of study we will discuss three important concepts for understanding communication practices among cultures.

High and Low Context

Think about someone you are very close to—a best friend, romantic partner, or sibling. Have there been times when you began a sentence and the other person knew exactly what you were going to say before you said it? For example, in a situation between two sisters, one sister might exclaim, "Get off!" (which is short for "get off my wavelength"). This phenomenon of being on someone's wavelength is similar to what Hall describes as high context. ***In high context communication the meaning is in the people, or more specifically, the relationship between the people as opposed to just the words.*** When we have to rely on the translation of the words to decipher a person's meaning then this is said to be low context communication. The American legal system, for example, relies on low context communication.

While some cultures are low or high context, in general terms, there can also be individual or contextual differences within cultures. In the example above between the two sisters, they are using high context communication, however, America is considered a low context culture. Countries such as Germany and Sweden are also low context while Japan and China are high context.

Speech Styles

When we think about communication, it's easy to imagine that everyone says things the same way we do. But in reality, people and cultures have many different ways of expressing themselves. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey describe four communication style continuums—ways of thinking about how messages can vary. These are not fixed categories but flexible options. Depending on the context—who you're speaking to, where you are, or what you want to achieve—you might shift along these continuums.

Direct vs. Indirect

This first continuum looks at how clearly people state their meaning. Direct speakers say exactly what they want (e.g., "Close the window"). Indirect speakers drop hints (e.g., "It's cold in here"). In the U.S., where directness is common, people may find indirectness frustrating. But in more formal or respectful situations—say, speaking to a university president—an indirect request may sound more polite and appropriate.

Elaborate, Exact, and Succinct

Think of Goldilocks: too much, too little, or just right. Elaborate speakers use many words, details, or stories. Exact speakers give enough information to be clear without overdoing it. Succinct speakers prefer short, simple statements—and sometimes silence. For example, while an American might say, "That garden is beautiful," an Egyptian speaker might describe the colors, flowers, and memories they inspire.

Personal vs. Contextual

Some languages and cultures emphasize the speaker as an individual (personal style). Others emphasize the relationship between

speaker and listener (contextual style). English leans personal—we don't change sentence structure based on status. But in languages like French or Spanish, the formal and informal "you" signals how close or distant the relationship is.

Instrumental vs. Affective

Finally, this continuum asks: who is responsible for making sure a message is understood? In instrumental styles (like in the U.S.), the speaker carries the burden of clarity. In affective styles (common in parts of Asia and in Native American cultures), listeners are expected to pay close attention to words, tone, and context to figure out meaning. In an American classroom, students might blame the professor for not explaining clearly. In a Chinese classroom, students may instead take responsibility, saying they need to study harder.

Collectivist versus Individualistic

In addition to the four speaking styles that characterize cultures so do value systems. One of particular importance to intercultural communication is whether the culture has a collectivistic or individualistic orientation. When a person or culture has a collective orientation they place the needs and interests of the group above individual desires or motivations. In contrast, the self or one's own personal goals motivate those cultures with individualistic orientations. Thus, each person is viewed as responsible for their own success or failure in life.

When looking at Hofstede's research and that of others on individualism and collectivism, it is important to remember is that no culture is purely one or the other. Again, think of these qualities as points along a continuum rather than fixed positions. Individuals and co-cultures may exhibit differences in individualism/collectivism from the dominant culture and certain contexts may highlight one or the other. Also remember that it can be very difficult to change one's orientation and interaction with those with different value orientations can prove challenging. In some of your classes, for example, does the Professor require a group project as part of the final grade? How do students respond to such an assignment? In our experience we find that some students enjoy and benefit from the collective and collaborative process and seem to learn better in such an environment. These students have more of a collective orientation. Other students, usually the majority, are resistant to such assignments citing reasons such as "it's difficult to coordinate schedules with four other people" or "I don't want my grade resting on someone else's performance." These statements reflect an individual orientation.

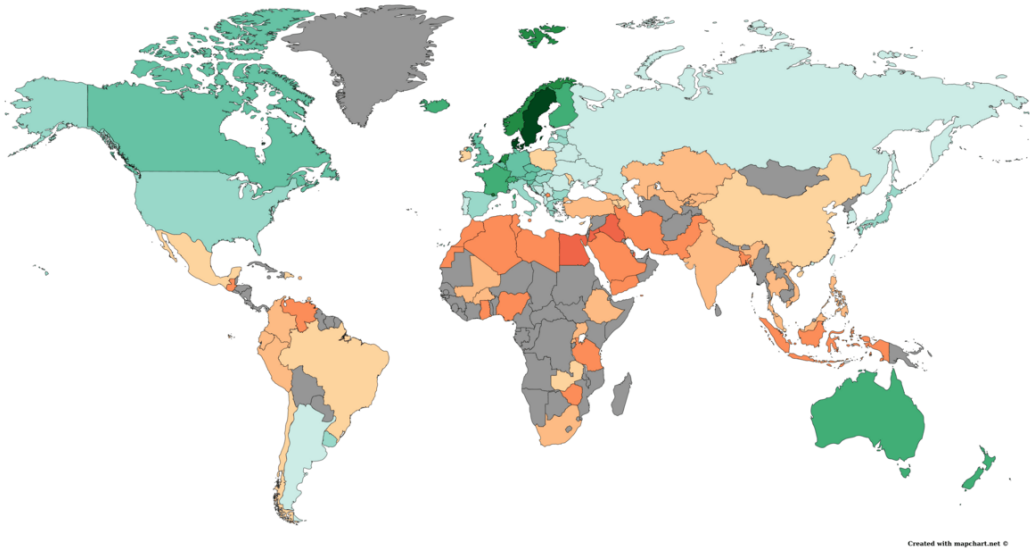


Figure 8.5.1 Collectivism vs Individualism Worldwide

Countries colored with green have cultures that are more individualistic than the world average. Countries colored in red have relatively collectivistic cultures.

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9: SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

9.1: Understanding Small Groups
9.2: Small Group Development
9.3: Small Group Dynamics

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9.1: Understanding Small Groups

Learning Objectives

- Define small group communication.
- Discuss the characteristics of small groups.
- Explain the functions of small groups.
- Compare and contrast different types of small groups.
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of small groups.

Small group communication refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity. In this section, we will learn about the characteristics, functions, and types of small groups.

Characteristics of Small Groups

Different groups have different characteristics, serve different purposes, and can lead to positive, neutral, or negative experiences. While our interpersonal relationships primarily focus on relationship building, small groups usually focus on some sort of task completion or goal accomplishment. A college learning community focused on math and science, a campaign team for a state senator, and a group of friends planning a camping trip are examples of small groups that would all have a different size, structure, identity, and interaction pattern.

Size of Small Groups

There is no set number of members for the ideal small group. A small group requires a minimum of three people (because two people would be a pair or dyad), but the upper range of group size is contingent on the purpose of the group. When groups grow beyond fifteen to twenty members, it becomes difficult to consider them a small group based on the previous definition. An analysis of the number of unique connections between members of small groups shows that they are deceptively complex. For example, within a six-person group, there are fifteen separate potential dyadic connections, and a twelve-person group would have sixty-six potential dyadic connections (Hargie, 2011). As you can see, when we double the number of group members, we more than double the number of connections, which shows that network connection points in small groups grow exponentially as membership increases. So, while there is no set upper limit on the number of group members, it makes sense that the number of group members should be limited to those necessary to accomplish the goal or serve the purpose of the group. Small groups that add too many members increase the potential for group members to feel overwhelmed or disconnected.

Structure of Small Groups

Internal and external influences affect a group's structure. In terms of internal influences, member characteristics play a role in initial group formation. For instance, a person who is well informed about the group's task and/or highly motivated as a group member may emerge as a leader and set into motion internal decision-making processes, such as recruiting new members or assigning group roles, that affect the structure of a group (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Different members will also gravitate toward different roles within the group and will advocate for certain procedures and courses of action over others. External factors such as group size, task, and resources also affect group structure. Some groups will have more control over these external factors through decision making than others. For example, a commission that is put together by a legislative body to look into ethical violations in campaign finance will likely have less control over its external factors than a self-created weekly book club.

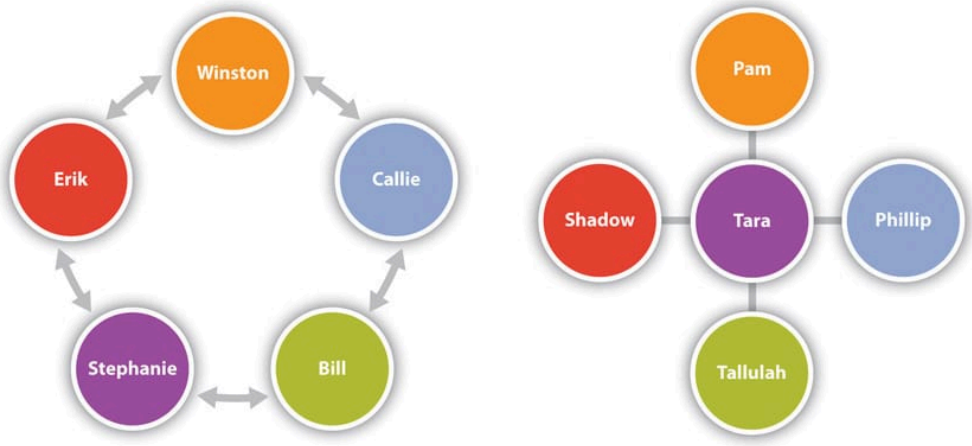


Figure 9.1.1 A self-formed study group likely has a more flexible structure than a city council committee. William Rotza – Group – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Group structure is also formed through formal and informal network connections. In terms of formal networks, groups may have clearly defined roles and responsibilities or a hierarchy that shows how members are connected. The group itself may also be a part of an organizational hierarchy that networks the group into a larger organizational structure. Conversely, groups have more control over their informal networks, which are connections among individuals within the group and among group members and people outside of the group that aren't official. For example, a group member's friend or relative may be able to secure a space to hold a fundraiser at a discounted rate, which helps the group achieve its task. Both types of networks are important because they may help facilitate information exchange within a group and extend a group's reach in order to access other resources.

Size and structure also affect communication within a group (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). In terms of size, the more people in a group, the more issues with scheduling and coordination of communication. Remember that time is an important resource in most group interactions and a resource that is usually strained. Structure can increase or decrease the flow of communication. Reachability refers to the way in which one member is or isn't connected to other group members. For example, the "Circle" group structure in Figure 13.1 "Small Group Structures" shows that each group member is connected to two other members. This can make coordination easy when only one or two people need to be brought in for a decision. In this case, Erik and Callie are very reachable by Winston, who could easily coordinate with them. However, if Winston needed to coordinate with Bill or Stephanie, he would have to wait on Erik or Callie to reach that person, which could create delays. The circle can be a good structure for groups who are passing along a task and in which each member is expected to progressively build on the others' work. A group of students collectively working on a group presentation about the sexual behavior of pandas may work in such a manner, with each person adding to the content of the presentation and then passing it on to the next person in the circle. In this case, they can ask the previous person questions and write with the next person's area of expertise in mind. The "Wheel" group structure in Figure 13.1 "Small Group Structures" shows an alternative organization pattern. In this structure, Tara is very reachable by all members of the group. This can be a useful structure when Tara is the person with the most expertise in the task or the leader who needs to review and approve work at each step before it is passed along to other group members. But Phillip and Shadow, for example, wouldn't likely work together without Tara being involved.

Figure 9.1.2 Small Group Structures



Looking at the group structures, we can make some assumptions about the communication that takes place in them. The wheel is an example of a centralized structure, while the circle is decentralized. Research has shown that centralized groups are better than decentralized groups in terms of speed and efficiency (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). But decentralized groups are more effective at solving complex problems. In centralized groups like the wheel, the person with the most connections, person C, is also more likely to be the leader of the group or at least have more status among group members, largely because that person has a broad perspective of what's going on in the group. The most central person can also act as a gatekeeper. Since this person has access to the most information, which is usually a sign of leadership or status, he or she could consciously decide to limit the flow of information. But in complex tasks, that person could become overwhelmed by the burden of processing and sharing information with all the other group members. The circle structure is more likely to emerge in groups where collaboration is the goal and a specific task and course of action isn't required under time constraints. While the person who initiated the group or has the most expertise in regards to the task may emerge as a leader in a decentralized group, the equal access to information lessens the hierarchy and potential for gatekeeping that is present in the more centralized groups.

Interdependence

Small groups exhibit interdependence, meaning they share a common purpose and a common fate. If the actions of one or two group members lead to a group deviating from or not achieving their purpose, then all members of the group are affected. Conversely, if the actions of only a few of the group members lead to success, then all members of the group benefit. This is a major contributor to many college students' dislike of group assignments, because they feel a loss of control and independence that they have when they complete an assignment alone. This concern is valid if their grades suffer because of the negative actions of someone else or their hard work may go to benefit the group member who just skated by. Group meeting attendance is a clear example of the interdependent nature of group interaction. Many of us have arrived at a group meeting only to find half of the members missing. In some cases, the group members who show up have to leave and reschedule because they can't accomplish their task without the other members present. Group members who attend meetings but withdraw or don't participate can also derail group progress. Although it can be frustrating to have your job, grade, or reputation partially dependent on the actions of others, the interdependent nature of groups can also lead to higher-quality performance and output, especially when group members are accountable for their actions.

Shared Identity

The shared identity of a group manifests in several ways. Groups may have official charters or mission and vision statements that lay out the identity of a group. For example, the Girl Scout mission states that "Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place" (Girl Scouts, 2012). The mission for this large organization influences the identities of the thousands of small groups called troops. Group identity is often formed around a shared goal and/or previous accomplishments, which adds dynamism to the group as it looks toward the future and back on the past to inform its present. Shared identity can also be exhibited through group names, slogans, songs, handshakes, clothing, or other symbols. At a family reunion, for example, matching t-shirts specially made for the occasion, dishes made from recipes passed down from generation to generation, and shared stories of family members that have passed away help establish a shared identity and social reality.

A key element of the formation of a shared identity within a group is the establishment of the in-group as opposed to the out-group. The degree to which members share in the in-group identity varies from person to person and group to group. Even within a family, some members may not attend a reunion or get as excited about the matching t-shirts as others. Shared identity also emerges as groups become cohesive, meaning they identify with and like the group's task and other group members. The presence of cohesion and a shared identity leads to a building of trust, which can also positively influence productivity and members' satisfaction.

Functions of Small Groups

Why do we join groups? Even with the challenges of group membership that we have all faced, we still seek out and desire to be a part of numerous groups. In some cases, we join a group because we need a service or access to information. We may also be drawn to a group because we admire the group or its members. Whether we are conscious of it or not, our identities and self-concepts are built to some extent on the groups with which we identify. So, to answer the earlier question, we join groups because they function to help us meet instrumental, interpersonal, and identity needs.

Groups Meet Instrumental Needs

Groups have long served the instrumental needs of humans, helping with the most basic elements of survival since ancient humans first evolved. Groups helped humans survive by providing security and protection through increased numbers and access to resources. Today, groups are rarely such a matter of life and death, but they still serve important instrumental functions. Labor unions, for example, pool efforts and resources to attain material security in the form of pay increases and health benefits for their members, which helps members by providing a stable and dependable livelihood. Individual group members must also work to secure the instrumental needs of the group, creating a reciprocal relationship. Members of labor unions pay dues that help support the group's efforts.

Some groups also meet our informational needs. Although they may not provide material resources, they enrich our knowledge or provide information that we can use to then meet our own instrumental needs. Many groups provide referrals to resources or offer advice. For example, several social advocacy/political groups, such as MoveOn.Org, were formed to provide information to its members and social/political isues and solicit funds to act, as group, on those issues. Whether a group forms to provide services to members that they couldn't get otherwise, advocate for changes that will affect members' lives, or provide information, many groups meet some type of instrumental need.

Groups Meet Interpersonal Needs

Group membership meets interpersonal needs by giving us access to inclusion, control, and support. In terms of inclusion, people have a fundamental drive to be a part of a group and to create and maintain social bonds. Family and friendship groups, shared-interest groups, and activity groups all provide us with a sense of belonging and being included. People also join groups because they want to have some control over a decision-making process or to influence the outcome of a group. Being a part of a group allows people to share opinions and influence others. Conversely, some people join a group to be controlled, because they don't want to be the sole decision maker or leader and instead want to be given a role to follow.

Just as we enter into interpersonal relationships because we like someone, we are drawn toward a group when we are attracted to it and/or its members. Groups also provide support for others in ways that supplement the support that we get from significant others in interpersonal relationships. Some groups, like therapy groups for survivors of sexual assault or support groups for people with cancer, exist primarily to provide emotional support. While these groups may also meet instrumental needs through connections and referrals to resources, they fulfill the interpersonal need for belonging that is a central human need.

Groups Meet Identity Needs

Our affiliations are building blocks for our identities, because group membership allows us to use reference groups for social comparison—in short, identifying us with some groups and characteristics and separating us from others. Some people join groups to be affiliated with people who share similar or desirable characteristics in terms of beliefs, attitudes, values, or cultural identities. For example, people may join the National Organization for Women because they want to affiliate with others who

support women's rights or a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) because they want to affiliate with African Americans, people concerned with civil rights, or a combination of the two. Also, the work that people do as a part of a religious community—as a lay leader, deacon, member of a prayer group, or committee—may have deep ties to a person's identity.



Figure 9.1.3 Group membership helps meet our interpersonal needs by providing an opportunity for affection and inclusion.

Lostintheredwoods – Spiral of Hands – CC BY-ND 2.0.

The prestige of a group can initially attract us because we want that group's identity to "rub off" on our own identity. Likewise, the achievements we make as a group member can enhance our self-esteem, add to our reputation, and allow us to create or project certain identity characteristics to engage in impression management. For example, a person may take numerous tests to become a part of Mensa, which is an organization for people with high IQs, for no material gain but for the recognition or sense of achievement that the affiliation may bring. Likewise, people may join sports teams, professional organizations, and honor societies for the sense of achievement and affiliation.

Types of Small Groups

Small groups can take many forms, but most fall into two main categories: **task-oriented** and **relational-oriented.** Task-oriented groups are created to solve problems, complete projects, or generate ideas. Study groups, committees, and work teams are good examples, and their success is usually judged by the quality of the final product, such as a report, presentation, or event. Relational-oriented groups, on the other hand, focus on building and maintaining personal connections. Families and close friend groups fit here, where the primary goal is spending time together and offering support, even if tasks like planning trips or hosting parties also happen along the way. In practice, most small groups combine both elements. A group of friends planning a party, for instance, is completing a task, but their main purpose is enjoying each other's company.

Groups also differ in how and why they form. **Primary groups** such as family and close friends are long-lasting and deeply personal, sometimes even taking the form of "chosen families" when people rely on close friends instead of relatives. **Secondary groups,** like classmates, coworkers, or club members, are usually more temporary and goal-focused, with interactions that center on tasks rather than deep personal bonds.

Beyond these, people also participate in other kinds of groups. **Interest groups** such as fan clubs or hobby communities form around shared passions, while **support groups** bring people together to face challenges like grief or weight loss. **Service groups** such as Habitat for Humanity or Rotary Club aim to help others, while **advocacy groups** work to promote causes and create social change. **Teams** represent a special type of task-oriented group in which members are highly committed to both the task and one another. Strong teams often stand out for their clear goals, good leadership, and collaborative spirit, which makes them especially

common in professional settings.

Finally, many groups today exist online. Virtual study groups, remote work teams, and social communities rely on digital tools to connect and collaborate, showing how small groups continue to adapt to changing technologies and new ways of bringing people together.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Small Groups

When you hear the words “group project,” you might immediately groan. But working in small groups isn’t just a classroom exercise—it’s how many decisions get made in families, communities, and even government. Small groups come with both advantages and disadvantages. Understanding these can help you get the most out of group work and avoid common frustrations.

Table 9.1.1: Quick Review

Advantages	Disadvantages
Shared decision-making	Can be slower than individual work
Access to shared resources and networks	Not efficient for specialized tasks
Synergy (better results together)	Scheduling and coordination issues
Exposure to diversity and new perspectives	Risk of social loafing (unequal effort)

Advantages of Small Groups

Small groups give us access to shared decision-making, resources, and perspectives. When people pool their ideas and experiences, they often make better choices than one person could alone—especially when ethical or high-stakes issues are involved. Groups also help us tap into networks. For example, a community theater group may get costumes, props, and volunteers more easily than a single person could.

Another advantage is synergy—the idea that a group can create something greater than the sum of its parts. For instance, when I worked in residence life, we organized a “World Cup Soccer Tournament.” Together, we designed team brackets, found sponsors, gathered prizes, and pulled off a successful event that no individual could have managed alone.

Finally, small groups often expose us to diversity. Working with people from different cultural backgrounds, or even just with different life experiences, can broaden our perspectives. In class discussions, for example, students often teach one another things I couldn’t explain as effectively myself. Diversity and synergy often go hand in hand, making group interaction richer and more meaningful.

Disadvantages of Small Groups

Of course, small groups aren’t perfect. Sometimes one person with specialized knowledge is more efficient than a group. Group processes can also be slow—making them less effective when decisions need to be made quickly. In those cases, a clear leader or “point person” may be best.

Groups also face interpersonal challenges. Scheduling meetings can be a headache, and some people struggle with the cooperation and compromise that groups require. Another common problem is social loafing—when some members contribute less, assuming others will pick up the slack. This is one of the main reasons many students (and professionals) dislike group work.

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9.2: Small Group Development

Learning Objectives

- Explain the process of group development.
- Discuss the characteristics of each stage of group development.

Small groups have to start somewhere. Even established groups go through changes as members come and go, as tasks are started and completed, and as relationships change. In this section, we will learn about the stages of group development, which are forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). As with most models of communication phenomena, although we order the stages and discuss them separately, they are not always experienced in a linear fashion. Additionally, some groups don't experience all five stages, may experience stages multiple times, or may experience more than one stage at a time.



Figure 9.2.1 Getting to know you

Forming

The **forming stage** is when group members first get to know each other and begin to understand the group's purpose. There's usually uncertainty as people figure out roles, goals, and group norms. Cohesion—how connected and committed members feel—starts to develop here. Every time a group's membership changes, it goes through a mini-forming stage. Voluntary groups may start with excitement, while assigned groups can have reluctant members, which may hurt group unity. Still, positive members can help steer the group forward. Personality, skills, group size, and how the group was formed all influence this stage. Dominant members might take charge early, especially in larger groups, which can lead to cliques or conflict later. Groups given clear goals and roles from outside may have less uncertainty, but too much control can cause frustration. A bit of uncertainty allows members to connect and shape their own group dynamic.

Storming

In the **storming stage**, group members start to take on roles, express opinions, and figure out where they fit. As the group's purpose and rules become clearer, conflict often arises—especially if people are unhappy with their roles or decisions being made. Some may resist a new or emerging leader, leading to tension. While conflict can seem negative, it can actually help the

group grow, improve ideas, and make better decisions. However, if a group gets stuck in this stage, progress can stall. Pre-existing personal conflicts can also make this stage more difficult and distract from productive teamwork.

Norming

In the **norming stage**, group expectations and routines become clear, creating more stability and teamwork. **Group norms**—unstated but understood behaviors—guide how members act, such as being polite or arriving on time. These often mirror everyday social norms. When norms work well, the group runs smoothly. But if norms aren't helpful, they may need to be challenged, which can cause conflict and return the group to earlier stages. By now, roles and leadership are more accepted, and the group begins to form a stronger identity. This stage helps the group function effectively and move toward accomplishing its goals. However, too much pressure to conform can make members feel excluded. Some groups also follow explicit rules, such as dress codes or performance standards, shared through policies or handbooks. Breaking rules usually has clear consequences, while breaking norms may not.

Performing

During the **performing stage** of group development, group members work relatively smoothly toward the completion of a task or achievement of a purpose. Although interactions in the performing stage are task focused, the relational aspects of group interaction provide an underlying support for the group members. **Socialization** outside of official group time can serve as a needed relief from the group's task. During task-related interactions, group members ideally begin to develop a synergy that results from the pooling of skills, ideas, experiences, and resources. Synergy is positive in that it can lead group members to exceed their expectations and perform better than they could individually. Glitches in the group's performance can lead the group back to previous stages of group development. Changes in membership, member roles, or norms can necessitate a revisiting of aspects of the forming, storming, or norming stages. One way to continue to build group cohesion during the performing stage is to set short-term attainable group goals. Accomplishing something, even if it's small, can boost group morale, which in turn boosts cohesion and productivity.

Adjourning

The **adjourning stage** happens when a group ends—either because it finished its task, lost members or support, or faced other challenges. Some groups never reach this stage and continue on, while others may end early due to conflict. For groups with strong bonds, adjourning can be emotional. While some relationships continue afterward, many fade naturally once the group disbands. In contrast, groups with negative experiences may feel relief when ending. To close a group well, it helps to reflect on the experience. Celebrations or discussions can highlight lessons learned, even if the group didn't meet its goals. Members often leave with new skills or perspectives they can use in future groups or relationships.

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9.3: Small Group Dynamics

Learning Objectives

- Explain the relationship between group cohesion and group climate.
- Describe the process of group member socialization.
- Explain the relationship between conformity and groupthink.
- Define various types of group conflict and identify strategies for managing each type.

Any time a group of people come together, new dynamics are put into place that differ from the dynamics present in our typical dyadic interactions. The impressions we form about other people's likeability and the way we think about a group's purpose are affected by the climate within a group that is created by all members. Groups also develop norms, and new group members are socialized into a group's climate and norms just as we are socialized into larger social and cultural norms in our everyday life. The pressure to conform to norms becomes more powerful in group situations, and some groups take advantage of these forces with positive and negative results. Last, the potential for productive and destructive conflict increases as multiple individuals come together to accomplish a task or achieve a purpose. This section explores the dynamics mentioned previously in order to better prepare you for future group interactions.

Group Cohesion and Climate

When something is cohesive, it sticks together, and the cohesion within a group helps establish an overall group climate. Group climate refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. To better understand cohesion and climate, we can examine two types of cohesion: task and social.

Task cohesion refers to the commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group. **Social cohesion** refers to the attraction and liking among group members. Ideally, groups would have an appropriate balance between these two types of cohesion relative to the group's purpose, with task-oriented groups having higher task cohesion and relational-oriented groups having higher social cohesion. Even the most task-focused groups need some degree of social cohesion, and vice versa, but the balance will be determined by the purpose of the group and the individual members. For example, a team of workers from the local car dealership may join a local summer softball league because they're good friends and love the game. They may end up beating the team of faculty members from the community college who joined the league just to get to know each other better and have an excuse to get together and drink margaritas in the afternoon. In this example, the players from the car dealership exhibit high social and task cohesion, while the faculty exhibit high social but low task cohesion.

Cohesion benefits a group in many ways and can be assessed through specific group behaviors and characteristics. Groups with an appropriate level of cohesiveness (Hargie, 2011)

- set goals easily;
- exhibit a high commitment to achieving the purpose of the group;
- are more productive;
- experience fewer attendance issues;
- have group members who are willing to stick with the group during times of difficulty;
- have satisfied group members who identify with, promote, and defend the group;
- have members who are willing to listen to each other and offer support and constructive criticism; and
- experience less anger and tension.

Appropriate levels of group cohesion usually create a positive group climate, since group climate is affected by members' satisfaction with the group. Climate has also been described as group morale. Following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale (Marston & Hecht, 1988):

- **Participation.** Group members feel better when they feel included in discussion and a part of the functioning of the group.
- **Messages.** Confirming messages help build relational dimensions within a group, and clear, organized, and relevant messages help build task dimensions within a group.
- **Feedback.** Positive, constructive, and relevant feedback contribute to group climate.
- **Equity.** Aside from individual participation, group members also like to feel as if participation is managed equally within the group and that appropriate turn taking is used.
- **Clear and accepted roles.** Group members like to know how status and hierarchy operate within a group. Knowing the roles isn't enough to lead to satisfaction, though—members must also be comfortable with and accept those roles.
- **Motivation.** Member motivation is activated by perceived connection to and relevance of the group's goals or purpose.

Group cohesion and climate is also demonstrated through **symbolic convergence** (Bormann, 1985). Symbolic convergence refers to the sense of community or group consciousness that develops in a group through non-task-related communication such as stories and jokes. The originator of symbolic convergence theory, Ernest Bormann, claims that the sharing of group fantasies creates symbolic convergence. *Fantasy*, in this sense, doesn't refer to fairy tales, sexual desire, or untrue things. In group communication, group fantasies are verbalized references to events outside the "here and now" of the group, including references to the group's past, predictions for the future, or other communication about people or events outside the group (Griffin, 2009). For example, as a graduate student, I spent a lot of time talking with others in our small group about research, writing, and other things related to our classes and academia in general. Most of this communication wouldn't lead to symbolic convergence or help establish the strong social bonds that we developed as a group. Instead, it was our grad student "war stories" about excessive reading loads and unreasonable paper requirements we had experienced in earlier years of grad school, horror stories about absent or vindictive thesis advisors, and "you won't believe this" stories from the classes that we were teaching that brought us together.

In any group, you can tell when symbolic convergence is occurring by observing how people share such fantasies and how group members react to them. If group members react positively and agree with or appreciate the teller's effort or other group members are triggered to tell their own related stories, then convergence is happening and cohesion and climate are being established. Over time, these fantasies build a shared vision of the group and what it means to be a member that creates a shared group consciousness. By reviewing and applying the concepts in this section, you can hopefully identify potential difficulties with group cohesion and work to enhance cohesion when needed in order to create more positive group climates and enhance your future group interactions.

Socializing Group Members

Group socialization is the process of learning and teaching the rules, norms, and expectations for how group members interact. It helps create group identity and cohesion. Groups with strong bonds are more likely to accept and maintain norms, while groups with new members or forming for the first time require more active socialization.

Socialization involves two types of knowledge:

- **Technical knowledge** (skills and tasks), which is usually taught through training or manuals.
- **Social knowledge** (behavior and group norms), which is often learned informally through observation and interaction.

Organizations pass on both types through things like training, group history, or even social events. Socializing outside of official group time can strengthen bonds and support group norms.

Even after the initial stage, socialization continues as members reinforce or correct behavior. Breaking **rules** (explicit) can lead to formal consequences, while violating **norms** (unspoken) might lead to discomfort or subtle correction.

Overall, norms and rules help reduce uncertainty, make group behavior predictable, and allow the group to function smoothly without constant oversight.

Group Pressures

There must be some kind of motivating force present within groups in order for the rules and norms to help govern and guide a group. Without such pressure, group members would have no incentive to conform to group norms or buy into the group's identity and values.

Conformity

In general, some people are more likely to accept norms and rules than others, which can influence the interaction and potential for conflict within a group. While some people may feel a need for social acceptance that leads them to accept a norm or rule with minimal conformity pressure, others may actively resist because they have a valid disagreement or because they have an aggressive or argumentative personality (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Such personality traits are examples of internal pressures that operate within the individual group member and act as a self-governing mechanism. When group members discipline themselves and monitor their own behavior, groups need not invest in as many external mechanisms to promote conformity.

External pressures in the form of group policies, rewards or punishments, or other forces outside of individual group members also exert conformity pressure. In terms of group policies, groups that have an official admission process may have a probation period during which new members' membership is contingent on them conforming to group expectations. Deviation from expectations during this "trial period" could lead to expulsion from the group. Supervisors, mentors, and other types of group leaders are also agents that can impose external pressures toward conformity. These group members often have the ability to provide positive or negative reinforcement in the form of praise or punishment, which are clear attempts to influence behavior.

Conformity pressure can also stem from external forces when the whole group stands to receive a reward or punishment based on its performance, which ties back to the small group characteristic of interdependence. Although these pressures may seem negative, they also have positive results. Groups that exert an appropriate and ethical amount of conformity pressure typically have higher levels of group cohesion, which as we learned leads to increased satisfaction with group membership, better relationships, and better task performance. Groups with a strong but healthy level of conformity also project a strong group image to those outside the group, which can raise the group's profile or reputation (Hargie, 2011). Pressures toward conformity, of course, can go too far, as is evidenced in tragic stories of people driven to suicide because they felt they couldn't live up to the conformity pressure of their group and people injured or killed enduring hazing rituals that take expectations for group conformity to unethical and criminal extremes.

Groupthink

Groupthink is a negative group phenomenon characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas or courses of action that results from high levels of cohesion and/or high conformity pressures (Janis, 1972). We can better understand groupthink by examining its causes and effects. When group members fall victim to groupthink, the effect is uncritical acceptance of decisions or suggestions for plans of action to accomplish a task or goal. Group meetings that appear to go smoothly with only positive interaction among happy, friendly people may seem ideal, but these actions may be symptomatic of groupthink (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). When people rush to agreement or fear argument, groupthink has a tendency to emerge. Decisions made as a result of groupthink may range from a poorly-thought-out presentation method that bores the audience to a mechanical failure resulting in death.

Two primary causes of groupthink are high levels of cohesion and excessive conformity pressures. When groups exhibit high levels of social cohesion, members may be reluctant to criticize or question another group member's ideas or suggestions for fear that it would damage the relationship. When group members have a high level of task cohesion, they may feel invincible and not critically evaluate ideas. High levels of cohesion may actually lessen conformity pressures since group members who identify strongly with the group's members and mission may not feel a need to question the decisions or suggestions made by others. For those who aren't blinded by the high levels of cohesion, internal conformity pressures may still lead them to withhold criticism of an idea because the norm is to defer to decisions made by organization leaders or a majority of group members. External conformity pressures because of impending reward or punishment, time pressures, or an aggressive leader are also factors that can lead to groupthink.

To Avoid Groupthink, Groups Should:

- Divvy up responsibilities between group members so decision-making power isn't in the hands of a few
- Track contributions of group members in such a way that each person's input and output is recorded so that it can be discussed
- Encourage and reward the expression of minority or dissenting opinions
- Allow members to submit ideas prior to a discussion so that opinions aren't swayed by members who propose ideas early in a discussion
- Question each major decision regarding its weaknesses and potential negative consequences relative to competing decisions (encourage members to play "devil's advocate")
- Have decisions reviewed by an outside party that wasn't involved in the decision-making process
- Have a "reflection period" after a decision is made and before it is implemented during which group members can express reservations or second thoughts about the decision (Hargie, 2011)

Group Conflict

Conflict can appear in indirect or direct forms within group interaction, just as it can in interpersonal interactions. Group members may openly question each other's ideas or express anger toward or dislike for another person. Group members may also indirectly engage in conflict communication through innuendo, joking, or passive-aggressive behavior. Although we often view conflict negatively, conflict can be beneficial for many reasons. When groups get into a rut, lose creativity, or become complacent, conflict can help get a group out of a bad or mediocre routine. Conversely, conflict can lead to lower group productivity due to strain on the task and social dimensions of a group. There are three main types of conflict within groups: procedural, substantive, and interpersonal (Fujishin, 2001). Each of these types of conflict can vary in intensity, which can affect how much the conflict impacts the group and its members.

Procedural Conflict

Procedural conflict emerges from disagreements or trouble with the mechanics of group operations. In this type of conflict, group members differ in their beliefs about *how* something should be done. Procedural conflict can be handled by a group leader, especially if the leader put group procedures into place or has the individual power to change them. If there is no designated leader or the leader doesn't have sole power to change procedures (or just wants input from group members), proposals can be taken from the group on ways to address a procedural conflict to initiate a procedural change. A vote to reach a consensus or majority can also help resolve procedural conflict.



Figure 9.3.1 Procedural conflict can often be resolved with a group vote.

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Substantive Conflict

Substantive conflict focuses on group members' differing beliefs, attitudes, values, or ideas related to the purpose or task of the group. Rather than focusing on questions of *how*, substantive conflicts focus on questions of *what*. Substantive conflicts may emerge as a group tries to determine its purpose or mission. As members figure out how to complete a task or debate which project to start on next, there will undoubtedly be differences of opinion on what something means, what is acceptable in terms of supporting evidence for a proposal, or what is acceptable for a goal or performance standard. Leaders and other group members shouldn't rush to close this type of conflict down. Open discussion and debate regarding ideas and suggestions for group action can lead to higher-quality output and may prevent groupthink. Leaders who make final decisions about substantive conflict for the sake of moving on run the risk of creating a win/lose competitive climate in which people feel like their ideas may be shot down, which could lead to less participation. To resolve this type of conflict, group members may want to do research to see what other groups have done in similar situations, as additional information often provides needed context for conflict regarding information and ideas. Once the information is gathered, weigh all proposals and try to discover common ground among perspectives. Civil and open discussions that debate the merits of an idea are more desirable than a climate in which people feel personally judged for their ideas.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict emerges from conflict between individual members of the group. Whereas procedural conflict deals with *how* and substantive conflict deals with *what*, interpersonal conflict deals with *who*. Such conflict can be completely irrelevant to the functioning or purpose of the group, perhaps focusing instead on personality differences.. This type of conflict can also result from differences in beliefs, attitudes, and values (when such differences are taken personally rather than substantively); different personalities; or different communication styles. While procedural and substantive conflict may be more easily expressed because they do not directly address a person, interpersonal conflict may slowly build as people avoid openly criticizing or confronting others. Passive-aggressive behavior is a sign that interpersonal conflict may be building under the surface, and other group members may want to intervene to avoid escalation and retaliation. Leaders can also meet with people involved in interpersonal conflict privately to help them engage in perception checking and act as mediators, if needed. While people who initiate procedural or substantive conflict may be perceived by other group members as concerned about the group's welfare and seen as competent in their ability to notice areas on which the group could improve, people who initiate interpersonal conflict are often held in ill-regard by other group members (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). In a diverse group, it is essential that group members understand that others may well be culturally influenced and hold different attitudes/values regarding roles, rules, norms and expectations within the group context.

Primary and Secondary Tensions

Relevant to these types of conflict are **primary** and **secondary tensions** that emerge in every group (Bormann & Borman, 1988). When the group first comes together, members experience primary tension, which is tension based on uncertainty that is a natural part of initial interactions. It is only after group members begin to "break the ice" and get to know each other that the tension can be addressed and group members can proceed with the forming stage of group development. Small talk and politeness help group members manage primary tensions, and there is a relatively high threshold for these conflicts because we have all had experiences with such uncertainty when meeting people for the first time and many of us are optimistic that a little time and effort will allow us to get through the tensions. Since some people are more comfortable initiating conversation than others, it's important for more extroverted group members to include less talkative members. Intentionally or unintentionally excluding people during the negotiation of primary tensions can lead to unexpected secondary tensions later on. During this stage people are also less direct in their communication, using more hedges and vague language than they will later in the group process. The indirect communication and small talk that characterize this part of group development aren't a waste of time, as they help manage primary tensions and lay the foundation for future interactions that may involve more substantive conflict.

Secondary tension emerges after groups have passed the forming stage of group development and begin to have conflict over member roles, differing ideas, and personality conflicts. These tensions are typically evidenced by less reserved and less polite

behavior than primary tensions. People also have a lower tolerance threshold for secondary tensions, because rather than being an expected part of initial interaction, these conflicts can be more negative and interfere with the group's task performance. Secondary tensions are inevitable and shouldn't be feared or eliminated. It's not the presence or absence of secondary tension that makes a group successful or not; it's how it handles the tensions when they emerge. A certain level of secondary tension is tolerable, not distracting, and can actually enhance group performance and avoid groupthink. When secondary tensions rise above the tolerance threshold and become distracting, they should be released through direct means such as diplomatic confrontation or indirect means such as appropriate humor or taking a break. While primary tensions eventually disappear (at least until a new member arrives), secondary tensions will come and go and may persist for longer periods of time. For that reason, we will now turn to a discussion of how to manage conflict in group interaction.

Managing Conflict in Small Groups

Some common ways to manage conflict include clear decision-making procedures, third-party mediation, and leader facilitation (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Commonly used methods such as majority vote can help or hurt conflict management efforts. While an up-and-down vote can allow a group to finalize a decision and move on, members whose vote fell on the minority side may feel resentment toward other group members. This can create a win/lose climate that leads to further conflict. Having a leader who makes ultimate decisions can also help move a group toward completion of a task, but conflict may only be pushed to the side and left not fully addressed. Third-party mediation can help move a group past a conflict and may create less feelings of animosity, since the person mediating and perhaps making a decision isn't a member of the group. In some cases, the leader can act as an internal third-party mediator to help other group members work productively through their conflict.

Tips for Managing Group Conflict (Ellis & Fisher, 1994)

1. Clarify the issue at hand by getting to the historical roots of the problem. Keep in mind that perception leads us to punctuate interactions differently, so it may be useful to know each person's perspective of when, how, and why the conflict began.
2. Create a positive discussion climate by encouraging and rewarding active listening.
3. Discuss needs rather than solutions. Determine each person's needs to be met and goals for the outcome of the conflict before offering or acting on potential solutions.
4. Set boundaries for discussion and engage in gatekeeping to prevent unproductive interactions like tangents and personal attacks.
5. Use "we" language to maintain existing group cohesion and identity, and use "I" language to help reduce defensiveness.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Conflict

Remember that a complete lack of conflict in a group is a bad sign, as it indicates either a lack of activity or a lack of commitment on the part of the members (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Conflict, when properly handled, can lead a group to have a better understanding of the issues they face. For example, substantive conflict brings voice to alternative perspectives that may not have been heard otherwise. Additionally, when people view conflict as healthy, necessary, and productive, they can enter into a conflict episode with an open mind and an aim to learn something. This is especially true when those who initiate substantive conflict are able to share and defend their views in a competent and civil manner. Group cohesion can also increase as a result of well-managed conflict. Occasional experiences of tension and unrest followed by resolutions makes groups feel like they have accomplished something, which can lead them to not dread conflict and give them the confidence to more productively deal with it the next time.

Conflict that goes on for too long or is poorly handled can lead to decreased cohesiveness. Group members who try to avoid a conflict can still feel anger or frustration when the conflict drags on. Members who consistently take task-oriented conflict personally and escalate procedural or substantive conflict to interpersonal conflict are especially unpopular with other group members. Mishandled or chronic conflict can eventually lead to the destruction of a group or to a loss in members as people weigh the costs and rewards of membership (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Hopefully a skilled leader or other group members can take on conflict resolution roles in order to prevent these disadvantages of conflict.

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10: LEADERSHIP, ROLES, AND PROBLEM SOLVING IN GROUPS

10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
10.2: Group Member Roles
10.3: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

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10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the various perspectives on how and why people become leaders.
- Compare and contrast various leadership styles.
- Discuss the types of power that a leader may tap into.

It's important to point out that although a group may have only one official leader, other group members play important leadership roles. Making this distinction also helps us differentiate between leaders and leadership (Hargie, 2011). The leader is a group role that is associated with a high-status position and may be formally or informally recognized by group members. Leadership is a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its task. A person in the role of leader may provide no or poor leadership. Likewise, a person who is not recognized as a "leader" in title can provide excellent leadership. In the remainder of this section, we will discuss some approaches to the study of leadership, leadership styles, and leadership and group dynamics.

Why and How People Become Leaders

Before we move onto specific approaches to studying leadership, let's distinguish between designated and emergent leaders. In general, some people gravitate more toward leadership roles than others, and some leaders are designated while other are emergent (Hargie, 2011). Designated leaders are officially recognized in their leadership role and may be appointed or elected by people inside or outside the group. Designated leaders can be especially successful when they are sought out by others to fulfill and are then accepted in leadership roles. Some people seek out leadership positions not because they possess leadership skills and have been successful leaders in the past but because they have a drive to hold and wield power. Many groups are initially leaderless and must either designate a leader or wait for one to emerge organically. Emergent leaders gain status and respect through engagement with the group and its task and are turned to by others as a resource when leadership is needed. Emergent leaders may play an important role when a designated leader unexpectedly leaves.



Figure 10.1.1 Woman Leading Meeting

Leaders Emerge Because of Their Traits

The trait approach to studying leadership distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits, or personal characteristics (Pavitt, 1999). Some traits that leaders, in general, share are related to physical appearance, communication ability, intelligence, and personality (Cragan & Wright, 1991). In terms of physical appearance, designated leaders tend to be taller and more attractive

than other group members. This could be because we consciously and/or subconsciously associate a larger size (in terms of height and build, but not body fat) with strength and strength with good leadership. As far as communication abilities, leaders speak more fluently, have a more confident tone, and communicate more often than other group members. Leaders are also moderately more intelligent than other group members, which is attractive because leaders need good problem-solving skills. Last, leaders are usually more extroverted, assertive, and persistent than other group members. These personality traits help get these group members noticed by others, and expressivity is often seen as attractive and as a sign of communication competence.

The trait approach to studying leaders has provided some useful information regarding how people view ideal leaders, but it has not provided much insight into why some people become and are more successful leaders than others. The list of ideal traits is not final, because excellent leaders can have few, if any, of these traits and poor leaders can possess many. Additionally, these traits are difficult to change or control without much time and effort. Because these traits are enduring, there isn't much room for people to learn and develop leadership skills, which makes this approach less desirable for communication scholars who view leadership as a communication competence. Rather than viewing these traits as a guide for what to look for when choosing your next leader, view them as traits that are made meaningful through context and communication behaviors.

Leaders Emerge Because of the Situation

The emergent approach to studying leadership considers how leaders emerge in groups that are initially leaderless and how situational contexts affect this process (Pavitt, 1999). The situational context that surrounds a group influences what type of leader is best. Situations may be highly structured, highly unstructured, or anywhere in between (Cragan & Wright, 1991). Research has found that leaders with a high task orientation are likely to emerge in both highly structured contexts like a group that works to maintain a completely automated factory unit and highly unstructured contexts like a group that is responding to a crisis. Relational-oriented leaders are more likely to emerge in semistructured contexts that are less formal and in groups composed of people who have specific knowledge and are therefore be trusted to do much of their work independently (Fiedler, 1967). For example, a group of local business owners who form a group for professional networking would likely prefer a leader with a relational-oriented style, since these group members are likely already leaders in their own right and therefore might resent a person who takes a rigid task-oriented style over a more collegial style.

Leaders emerge differently in different groups, but there are two stages common to each scenario (Bormann & Bormann, 1988). The first stage only covers a brief period, perhaps no longer than a portion of one meeting. During this first stage, about half of the group's members are eliminated from the possibility of being the group's leader. Remember that this is an informal and implicit process—not like people being picked for a kickball team or intentionally vetted. But there are some communicative behaviors that influence who makes the cut to the next stage of informal leader consideration. People will likely be eliminated as leader candidates if they do not actively contribute to initial group interactions, if they contribute but communicate poorly, if they contribute but appear too rigid or inflexible in their beliefs, or if they seem uninformed about the task of the group.

The second stage of leader emergence is where a more or less pronounced struggle for leadership begins. In one scenario, a leader candidate picks up an ally in the group who acts as a supporter or lieutenant, reinforcing the ideas and contributions of the candidate. If there are no other leader candidates or the others fail to pick up a supporter, the candidate with the supporter will likely become the leader. In a second scenario, there are two leader candidates who both pick up supporters and who are both qualified leaders. This leads to a more intense and potentially prolonged struggle that can actually be uncomfortable for other group members. Although the two leader candidates probably don't overtly fight with each other or say, "I should be leader, not you!" they both take strong stances in regards to the group's purpose and try to influence the structure, procedures, and trajectory for the group. Group members not involved in this struggle may not know who to listen to, which can lead to low task and social cohesion and may cause a group to fail. In some cases, one candidate-supporter team will retreat, leaving a clear leader to step up. But the candidate who retreated will still enjoy a relatively high status in the group and be respected for vying for leadership. The second-place candidate may become a nuisance for the new emergent leader, questioning his or her decisions. Rather than excluding or punishing the second-place candidate, the new leader should give him or her responsibilities within the group to make use of the group member's respected status.

Leaders Emerge Based on Communication Skill and Competence

This final approach to the study of leadership is considered a functional approach, because it focuses on how particular communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership. This last approach is the most useful for communication scholars and for people who want to improve their leadership skills, because leadership behaviors (which are learnable and adaptable) rather than traits or situations (which are often beyond our control) are the primary focus of study. As we've already learned, any group member can exhibit leadership behaviors, not just a designated or emergent leader. Therefore

leadership behaviors are important for all of us to understand even if we don't anticipate serving in leadership positions (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

The communication behaviors that facilitate effective leadership encompass three main areas of group communication including task, procedural, and relational functions. Although any group member can perform leadership behaviors, groups usually have patterns of and expectations for behaviors once they get to the norming and performing stages of group development. Many groups only meet one or two times, and in these cases it is likely that a designated leader will perform many of the functions to get the group started and then step in to facilitate as needed.

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's task-related functions include providing, seeking, and evaluating information. Leaders may want to be cautious about contributing ideas before soliciting ideas from group members, since the leader's contribution may sway or influence others in the group, therefore diminishing the importance of varying perspectives. Likewise a leader may want to solicit evaluation of ideas from members before providing his or her own judgment. In group situations where creativity is needed to generate ideas or solutions to a problem, the task leader may be wise to facilitate brainstorming and discussion.



Figure 10.1.2 A group leader with high communication competence can facilitate brainstorming

Luca Mascaro – Brainstorming – CC BY-SA 2.0.

This can allow the leader to keep his or her eye on the "big picture" and challenge group members to make their ideas more concrete or discuss their implications beyond the group without adding his or her own opinion.

Some Key Leadership Behaviors to Contribute to Task Functions:

- Contributing ideas
- Seeking ideas
- Evaluating ideas
- Seeking idea evaluation
- Visualizing abstract ideas
- Generalizing from specific ideas (Cragan & Wright, 1991)

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's procedural-related functions help guide the group as it proceeds from idea generation to implementation. Some leaders are better at facilitating and managing ideas than they are at managing the

administrative functions of a group. So while a group leader may help establish the goals of the group and set the agenda, another group member with more experience in group operations may step in to periodically revisit and assess progress toward completion of goals and compare the group's performance against its agenda. It's also important to check in between idea-generating sessions to clarify, summarize, and gauge the agreement level of group members. A very skilled and experienced leader may take primary responsibility for all these behaviors, but it's often beneficial to share them with group members to avoid becoming overburdened and foster inclusion.

Some Key Leadership Behaviors to Contribute to Procedural Functions:

- Goal setting
- Agenda making
- Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Verbalizing consensus
- Generalizing from specific ideas (Cragan & Wright, 1991)

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's relational functions include creating a participative and inclusive climate, establishing norms of reflection and self-analysis, and managing conflict. By encouraging participation among group members, a leader can help quell people who try to monopolize discussion and create an overall climate of openness and equality. Leaders want to make sure that people don't feel personally judged for their ideas and that criticism remains idea centered, not person centered. A safe and positive climate typically leads to higher-quality idea generation and decision making. Leaders also encourage group members to metacommunicate, or talk about the group's communication. This can help the group identify and begin to address any interpersonal or communication issues before they escalate and divert the group away from accomplishing its goal. A group with a well-established participative and inclusive climate will be better prepared to handle conflict when it emerges. Remember that conflict when handled competently can enhance group performance. Leaders may even instigate productive conflict by playing devil's advocate or facilitating civil debate of ideas.

Some Key Leadership Behaviors to Contribute to Relational Functions:

- Regulating participation
- Climate making
- Instigating group self-analysis
- Resolving conflict
- Instigating productive conflict (Cragan & Wright, 1991)

Leadership Styles

Given the large amount of research done on leadership, it is not surprising that there are several different ways to define or categorize leadership styles. In general, effective leaders do not fit solely into one style in any of the following classifications. Instead, they are able to adapt their leadership style to fit the relational and situational context (Wood, 1977). One common way to study leadership style is to make a distinction among autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leaders (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). These leadership styles can be described as follows:

- **Autocratic** leaders set policies and make decisions primarily on their own, taking advantage of the power present in their title or status to set the agenda for the group.
- **Democratic** leaders facilitate group discussion and like to take input from all members before making a decision.
- **Laissez-faire** leaders take a "hands-off" approach, preferring to give group members freedom to reach and implement their own decisions.

While this is a frequently cited model of leadership styles, we will focus in more detail on a model that was developed a few years after this one. It offers some more specifics in terms of the communicative elements of each leadership style. The four leadership styles used in this model are directive, participative, supportive, and achievement oriented (House & Mitchell, 1974).

Directive Leaders

Directive leaders help provide psychological structure for their group members by clearly communicating expectations, keeping a schedule and agenda, providing specific guidance as group members work toward the completion of their task, and taking the lead on setting and communicating group rules and procedures. Although this is most similar to the autocratic leadership style mentioned before, it is more nuanced and flexible. The originators of this model note that a leader can be directive without being seen as authoritarian. To do this, directive leaders must be good motivators who encourage productivity through positive reinforcement or reward rather than through the threat of punishment.



Figure 10.1.3 Directive leaders provide structure and clear expectations for their group. To be effective they must be skilled motivators.

The Open University – Speaker – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

A directive leadership style is effective in groups that do not have a history and may require direction to get started on their task. It can also be the most appropriate method during crisis situations in which decisions must be made under time constraints or other extraordinary pressures. When groups have an established history and are composed of people with unique skills and expertise, a directive approach may be seen as "micromanaging." In these groups, a more participative style may be the best option.

Participative Leaders

Participative leaders work to include group members in the decision-making process by soliciting and considering their opinions and suggestions. When group members feel included, their personal goals are more likely to align with the group and organization's goals, which can help productivity. This style of leadership can also aid in group member socialization, as the members feel like they get to help establish group norms and rules, which affects cohesion and climate. When group members participate more, they buy into the group's norms and goals more, which can increase conformity pressures for incoming group members. As we learned earlier, this is good to a point, but it can become negative when the pressures lead to unethical group member behavior. In addition to consulting group members for help with decision making, participative leaders also grant group members more freedom to work independently. This can lead group members to feel trusted and respected for their skills, which can increase their effort and output. The participative method of leadership is similar to the democratic style discussed earlier, and it is a style of leadership practiced in many organizations that have established work groups that meet consistently over long periods of time.

Supportive Leaders

Supportive leaders show concern for their followers' needs and emotions. They want to support group members' welfare through

a positive and friendly group climate. These leaders are good at reducing the stress and frustration of the group, which helps create a positive climate and can help increase group members' positive feelings about the task and other group members.

A supportive leadership style is more likely in groups that are primarily relational rather than task focused. For example, support groups and therapy groups benefit from a supportive leader. While maintaining positive relationships is an important part of any group's functioning, most task-oriented groups need to spend more time on task than social functions in order to efficiently work toward the completion of their task. Skilled directive or participative leaders of task-oriented groups would be wise to employ supportive leadership behaviors when group members experience emotional stress to prevent relational stress from negatively impacting the group's climate and cohesion.

Achievement-Oriented Leaders

Achievement-oriented leaders strive for excellence and set challenging goals, constantly seeking improvement and exhibiting confidence that group members can meet their high expectations. These leaders often engage in systematic social comparison, keeping tabs on other similar high-performing groups to assess their expectations and the group's progress. This type of leadership is similar to what other scholars call transformational or visionary leadership and is often associated with leaders like former Apple CEO Steve Jobs, talk show host and television network CEO Oprah Winfrey, former president Bill Clinton, and business magnate turned philanthropist Warren Buffett. In many cases, the leader is specifically chosen because of his or her reputation and expertise, and even though the group members may not have a history of working with the leader, the members and leader must have a high degree of mutual respect.

Leadership and Power

Leaders help move group members toward the completion of their goal using various motivational strategies. The types of power leaders draw on to motivate have long been a topic of small group study. A leader may possess or draw on any of the following five types of power to varying degrees: legitimate, expert, referent, information, and reward/coercive (French Jr. & Raven, 1959). Effective leaders do not need to possess all five types of power. Instead, competent leaders know how to draw on other group members who may be better able to exercise a type of power in a given situation.

Legitimate Power

The very title of *leader* brings with it **legitimate power**, which is power that flows from the officially recognized position, status, or title of a group member. For example, the leader of the "Social Media Relations Department" of a retail chain receives legitimate power through the title "director of social media relations." It is important to note though that being designated as someone with status or a position of power doesn't mean that the group members respect or recognize that power. Even with a title, leaders must still earn the ability to provide leadership. Of the five types of power, however, the leader alone is most likely to possess legitimate power.

Expert Power



Figure 10.1.4 A group member with expertise in an area relevant to the group's task may draw on expert power to lead the group.

UCD School of Medicine – Surgery Image 2 – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Expert power comes from knowledge, skill, or expertise that a group member possesses and other group members do not. For example, even though all the workers in the Social Media Relations Department have experience with computers, the information technology (IT) officer has expert power when it comes to computer networking and programming. Because of this, even though the director may have a higher status, she or he must defer to the IT officer when the office network crashes. A leader who has legitimate and expert power may be able to take a central role in setting the group's direction, contributing to problem solving, and helping the group achieve its goal. In groups with a designated leader who relies primarily on legitimate power, a member with a significant amount of expert power may emerge as an unofficial secondary leader.

Referent Power

Referent power comes from the attractiveness, likeability, and charisma of the group member. As we learned earlier, more physically attractive people and more outgoing people are often chosen as leaders. This could be due to their referent power. Referent power also derives from a person's reputation. A group member may have referent power if he or she is well respected outside of the group for previous accomplishments or even because he or she is known as a dependable and capable group member. Like legitimate power, the fact that a person possesses referent power doesn't mean he or she has the talent, skill, or other characteristic needed to actually lead the group. A person could just be likable but have no relevant knowledge about the group's task or leadership experience. Some groups actually desire this type of leader, especially if the person is meant to attract external attention and serve as more of a "figurehead" than a regularly functioning group member. For example, a group formed to raise funds for a science and nature museum may choose a former mayor, local celebrity, or NASA astronaut as their leader because of his or her referent power. In this situation it would probably be best for the group to have a secondary leader who attends to task and problem-solving functions within the group.

Information Power

Information power comes from a person's ability to access information that comes through informal channels and well-established social and professional networks. We have already learned that information networks are an important part of a group's structure and can affect a group's access to various resources. For example, the group formed to raise funds for the science and nature museum may need to draw on informal information networks to get leads on potential donors, to get information about what local science teachers would recommend for exhibits, or to book a band willing to perform for free at a fundraising concert.

Reward and Coercive Power

The final two types of power, **reward** and **coercive**, are related. Reward power comes from the ability of a group member to provide a positive incentive as a compliance-gaining strategy, and coercive power comes from the ability of a group member to provide a negative incentive. These two types of power can be difficult for leaders and other group members to manage, because their use can lead to interpersonal conflict. Reward power can be used by nearly any group member if he or she gives another group member positive feedback on an idea, an appreciation card for hard work, or a pat on the back.

Coercive power, since it entails punishment or negative incentive, can lead to interpersonal conflict and a negative group climate if it is overused or used improperly. While any leader or group member could make threats to others, leaders with legitimate power are typically in the best position to use coercive power. In such cases, coercive power may manifest in loss of pay and/or privileges, being excluded from the group, or being fired (if the group work is job related).

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10.2: Group Member Roles

Learning Objectives

- Identify and discuss task-related group roles and behaviors.
- Identify and discuss maintenance group roles and behaviors.
- Identify and discuss negative group roles and behaviors.

Just as leaders have been long studied as a part of group communication research, so too have group member roles. Group roles are more dynamic than leadership roles in that a role can be formal or informal and played by more than one group member. Additionally, one group member may exhibit various role behaviors within a single group meeting or play a few consistent roles over the course of his or her involvement with a group. Group communication scholars have cautioned us to not always think of these roles as neatly bounded all-inclusive categories. After all, we all play multiple roles within a group and must draw on multiple communication behaviors in order to successfully play them. When someone continually exhibits a particular behavior, it may be labeled as a role, but even isolated behaviors can impact group functioning. In this section, we will discuss the three categories of common group roles that were identified by early group communication scholars. These role categories include task-related roles, maintenance roles, and individual roles that are self-centered or unproductive for the group (Benne & Sheats, 1948).

Task-Related Roles and Behaviors

Task roles and their related behaviors contribute directly to the group's completion of a task or achievement of its goal or purpose. Task-related roles typically serve leadership, informational, or procedural functions. In this section we will discuss the following roles and behaviors: task leader, expediter, information provider, information seeker, gatekeeper, and recorder.

Role	Function
Task Leader	Sets direction
Expediter	Keeps progress moving
Info Provider	Gives information
Info Seeker	Asks questions
Gatekeeper	Encourages participation
Recorder	Takes notes

Task Leader

Within any group, there may be a task leader who has a high group status because of his or her maturity, problem-solving abilities, knowledge, and/or leadership experience and skills and functions primarily to help the group complete its task (Cragan & Wright, 1991). This person may be a designated or emergent leader, but in either case, task leaders tend to talk more during group interactions than other group members and also tend to do more work in the group. Depending on the number of tasks a group has, there may be more than one task leader, especially if the tasks require different sets of skills or knowledge. Because of the added responsibilities of being a task leader, people in these roles may experience higher levels of stress.

Task-leader behaviors can be further divided into two types: substantive and procedural (Pavitt, 1999). The substantive leader is the "idea person" who communicates "big picture" thoughts and suggestions that feed group discussion. The procedural leader is the person who gives the most guidance, perhaps following up on the ideas generated by the substantive leader. A skilled and experienced task leader may be able to perform both of these roles, but when the roles are filled by two different people, the person considered the procedural leader is more likely than the substantive leader to be viewed by members as the overall group leader. This indicates that task-focused groups assign more status to the person who actually guides the group toward the completion of the task (a "doer") than the person who comes up with ideas (the "thinker").

Expediter

The expediter is a task-related role that functions to keep the group on track toward completing its task by managing the agenda and setting and assessing goals in order to monitor the group's progress. An expediter must have a good sense of when a topic has been sufficiently discussed or when a group's extended focus on one area has led to diminishing returns. In such cases, the expediter may say, "Now that we've debated whether to go to Tahoe or Truckee, which place do you think has more support among our friends?" or "We've spent half of this meeting looking at how many bars/clubs each place has. Maybe we should switch gears so we can actually make a decision where to go."

If you've ever worked in a restaurant, you're probably familiar with an expediter's role in the kitchen. The person working "expo" helps make sure that the timing on all the dishes for a meal works out and that each plate is correct before it goes out to the table. This is by no means an easy job, since some entrées cook quicker than others and not everyone orders their burger the same way. So the expediter helps make order out of chaos by calling the food out to the kitchen in a particular order that logically works so that all the food will come up at the same time. Once the food is up, he or she also checks what's on the plate against what's on the ticket to make sure it matches. Expediting in a restaurant and in a small group is like a dance that requires some flexible and creative thinking and an ability to stick to a time frame and assess progress. To avoid the perception that group members are being rushed, a skilled expediter can demonstrate good active-listening skills by paraphrasing what has been discussed and summarizing what has been accomplished in such a way that makes it easier for group members to see the need to move on.

Information Provider

The role of information provider includes behaviors that are more evenly shared than in other roles, as ideally, all group members present new ideas, initiate discussions of new topics, and contribute their own relevant knowledge and experiences. When group members are brought together because they each have different types of information, early group meetings may consist of group members taking turns briefing each other on their area of expertise. In other situations, only one person in the group may be chosen because of his or her specialized knowledge and this person may be expected to be the primary information provider for all other group members. For example, some of you might not be familiar with how to access resources in your college's library. When you are doing a group research project (paper or presentation), it would be wise to have a group member who is knowledgeable about the library to help the other group members learn how to use the library's resources.

Information Seeker

The information seeker asks for more information, elaboration, or clarification on items relevant to the group's task. The information sought may include factual information or group member opinions. In general, information seekers ask questions for clarification, but they can also ask questions that help provide an important evaluative function. Most groups could benefit from more critically oriented information-seeking behaviors. As our discussion of groupthink notes, critical questioning helps increase the quality of ideas and group outcomes and helps avoid groupthink. By asking for more information, people have to defend (in a nonadversarial way) and/or support their claims, which can help ensure that the information being discussed is credible, relevant, and thoroughly considered. When information seeking or questioning occurs as a result of poor listening skills though, it risks negatively impacting the group. Skilled information providers and seekers are also good active listeners. They increase all group members' knowledge when they paraphrase and ask clarifying questions about the information presented.

Gatekeeper

The gatekeeper manages the flow of conversation in a group in order to achieve an appropriate balance so that all group members get to participate in a meaningful way. The gatekeeper may prompt others to provide information by saying something like "Let's each share one idea we have for a movie to show during Black History Month." He or she may also help correct an imbalance between members who have provided much information already and members who have been quiet by saying something like "Aretha, we've heard a lot from you today. Thank you. Beau, what are your thoughts on Aretha's suggestion?" Gatekeepers should be cautious about "calling people out" or at least making them feel that way. Instead of scolding someone for not participating, they should be invitational and ask a member to contribute to something specific instead of just asking if they have anything to add. Since gatekeepers can help group members feel included, they also service the relational aspects of the group.

Recorder

The recorder takes notes on the discussion and activities that occur during a group meeting. The recorder is the only role that is essentially limited to one person at a time since in most cases it wouldn't be necessary or beneficial to have more than one person recording. At less formal meetings there may be no recorder, while at formal meetings there is almost always a person who records meeting minutes, which are an overview of what occurred at the meeting. The role of recorder is sometimes regarded as a low-status position. Because of this, it may be desirable to have the role of recorder rotate among members (Cragan & Wright, 1991).



Figure 10.2.1 Fitting the group together

Maintenance Roles and Behaviors

Maintenance roles and their corresponding behaviors function to create and maintain social cohesion and fulfill the interpersonal needs of group members. All these role behaviors require strong and sensitive interpersonal skills. The maintenance roles we will discuss in this section include social-emotional leader, supporter, tension releaser, harmonizer, and interpreter.

Role	Function
Social-Emotional Leader	Supports group climate
Supporter	Encourages others
Tension Releaser	Reduces stress
Harmonizer	Resolves conflict
Interpreter	Clarifies communication

Social-Emotional Leader

The social-emotional leader within a group may perform a variety of maintenance roles and is generally someone who is well liked by the other group members and whose role behaviors complement but don't compete with the task leader. The social-emotional leader may also reassure and support the task leader when he or she becomes stressed. In general, the social-emotional leader is a reflective thinker who has good perception skills that he or she uses to analyze the group dynamics and climate and then initiate the appropriate role behaviors to maintain a positive climate. The socio emotional leader reliably functions to support group members and maintain a positive relational climate. Social-emotional leadership functions can actually become detrimental to the group and lead to less satisfaction among members when the maintenance behaviors being performed are seen as redundant

or as too distracting from the task (Pavitt, 1999).

Supporter

The role of supporter is characterized by communication behaviors that encourage other group members and provide emotional support as needed. The supporter's work primarily occurs in one-on-one exchanges that are more intimate and in-depth than the exchanges that take place during full group meetings. While many group members may make supporting comments publicly at group meetings, these comments are typically superficial and/or brief. A supporter uses active empathetic listening skills to connect with group members who may seem down or frustrated by saying something like "Tayesha, you seemed kind of down today. Is something going on?" Supporters also follow up on previous conversations with group members to maintain the connections they've already established by saying things like "Alan, I remember you said your mom is having surgery this weekend. I hope it goes well. Let me know if you need anything." The supporter's communication behaviors are probably the least noticeable of any of the other maintenance roles, which may make this group member's efforts seem overlooked. Leaders and other group members can help support the supporter by acknowledging his or her contributions.

Tension Releaser

The tension releaser is someone who has a good sense of humor and sensitive to the personalities of the group and the dynamics of any given situation and who uses these qualities to manage the frustration level of the group. Being funny is not enough to fulfill this role, as jokes or comments could indeed be humorous to other group members but be delivered at an inopportune time, which ultimately creates rather than releases tension. The healthy use of humor by the tension releaser performs the same maintenance function as the empathy employed by the harmonizer or the social-emotional leader, but it is less intimate and is typically directed toward the whole group instead of just one person. The tension releaser may start serving his or her function during the forming stage of group development when primary tensions are present due to the typical uncertainties present during initial interactions. The tension releaser may help "break the ice" or make others feel at ease during the group's more socially awkward first meetings.

Harmonizer

The harmonizer role is played by group members who help manage the various types of group conflict that emerge during group communication. They keep their eyes and ears open for signs of conflict among group members and ideally intervene appropriately before it escalates. For example, the harmonizer may sense that one group member's critique of another member's idea wasn't received positively, and he or she may be able to rephrase the critique in a more constructive way, which can help diminish the other group member's defensiveness. Harmonizers also deescalate conflict once it has already started—for example, by suggesting that the group take a break and then mediating between group members in a side conversation. These actions can help prevent conflict from spilling over into other group interactions. In cases where the whole group experiences conflict, the harmonizer may help lead the group in perception-checking discussions that help members see an issue from multiple perspectives. For a harmonizer to be effective, it's important that he or she be viewed as impartial and committed to the group as a whole rather than to one side of an issue or one person or faction within the larger group. A special kind of harmonizer that helps manage cultural differences within the group is the interpreter.

Interpreter

An interpreter helps manage the diversity within a group by mediating intercultural conflict, articulating common ground between different people, and generally creating a climate where difference is seen as an opportunity rather than as something to be feared. Just as an interpreter at the United Nations acts as a bridge between two different languages, the interpreter can bridge identity differences between group members. Interpreters can help perform the other maintenance roles discussed with a special awareness of and sensitivity toward cultural differences. While a literal interpreter would serve a task-related function within a group, this type of interpreter may help support a person who feels left out of the group because he or she has a different cultural identity than the majority of the group. Interpreters often act as allies to people who are different even though the interpreter doesn't share the specific cultural identity. The interpreter may help manage conflict that arises as a result of diversity, in this case, acting like an ambassador or mediator.

Negative Roles and Behaviors

Group communication scholars began exploring the negative side of group member roles more than sixty years ago (Benne & Sheats, 1948). Studying these negative roles can help us analyze group interactions and potentially better understand why some groups are more successful than others. It's important to acknowledge that we all perform some negative behaviors within groups at times but that those behaviors do not necessarily constitute a role. A person may temporarily monopolize a discussion to bring attention to his or her idea. If that behavior gets the attention of the group members and makes them realize they were misinformed or headed in a negative direction, then that behavior may have been warranted. Negative behaviors can be enacted with varying degrees of intensity and regularity, and their effects may range from mild annoyance to group failure. In general, the effects grow increasingly negative as they increase in intensity and frequency. While a single enactment of a negative role behavior may still harm the group, regular enactment of such behaviors would constitute a role, and playing that role is guaranteed to negatively impact the group. We will divide our discussion of negative roles into self-centered and unproductive roles.

Self-Centered Roles

The self-centered roles we will discuss are the central negative, monopolizer, self-confessor, insecure compliment seeker, and joker (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

Role	Function
Central Negative	Rejects ideas
Monopolizer	Dominates discussion
Self-Confessor	Shares personal issues
Insecure Compliment Seeker	Seeks reassurance
Joker	Distracts with humor

Central Negative

The central negative argues against most of the ideas and proposals discussed in the group and often emerges as a result of a leadership challenge during group formation. The failed attempt to lead the group can lead to feelings of resentment toward the leader and/or the purpose of the group, which then manifest in negative behaviors that delay, divert, or block the group's progress toward achieving its goal. This scenario is unfortunate because the central negative is typically a motivated and intelligent group member who can benefit the group if properly handled by the group leader or other members. Group communication scholars suggest that the group leader or leaders actively incorporate central negatives into group tasks and responsibilities to make them feel valued and to help diminish any residual anger, disappointment, or hurt feelings from the leadership conflict (Bormann & Bormann, 1988). Otherwise the central negative will continue to argue against the proposals and decisions of the group, even when they may be in agreement. In some cases, the central negative may unintentionally serve a beneficial function if his or her criticisms prevent groupthink.

Monopolizer

A monopolizer is a group member who talks too much, limiting others' chances to participate. Unlike skilled speakers who can hold attention, monopolizers often lack awareness of group norms and ignore nonverbal cues that show others are bored or frustrated. Some talk out of habit or self-interest, while others try to cover up limited knowledge by posing as experts.

Two common types of monopolizers are stage hogs and eggheads. Stage hogs dominate discussion with long stories, one-upping others, or listening only for ways to bring the focus back to themselves. Eggheads, on the other hand, rely on real knowledge but overwhelm the group with unnecessary detail. Some do this innocently, like absentminded professors, while others flaunt their expertise to appear superior. In both cases, the result is the same: the group slows down, participation shrinks, and the overall climate suffers.

Self-Confessor

The self-confessor is a group member who tries to use group meetings as therapy sessions for issues not related to the group's task. Self-confessors tend to make personal self-disclosures that are unnecessarily intimate. While it is reasonable to expect that someone experiencing a personal problem may want to consult with the group, especially if that person has formed close relationships with other group members, a self-confessor consistently comes to meetings with drama or a personal problem. A supporter or gatekeeper may be able to manage some degree of self-confessor behavior, but a chronic self-confessor is likely to build frustration among other group members that can lead to interpersonal conflict and a lack of cohesion and productivity.

Insecure Compliment Seeker

The insecure compliment seeker wants to know that he or she is valued by the group and seeks recognition that is often not task related. For example, they don't want to be told they did a good job compiling a report; they want to know that they're a good person or attractive or smart—even though they might not be any of those things. In short, they try to get validation from their relationships with group members—validation that they may be lacking in relationships outside the group. Or they may be someone who continually seeks the approval of others or tries to overcompensate for insecurity through excessive behaviors aimed at eliciting compliments. For example, if a group member wears a tight-fitting t-shirt in hopes of drawing attention to his physique but doesn't receive any compliments from the group, he may say, "My girlfriend said she could tell I've been working out. What do you think?"

Joker

The joker is a person who consistently uses sarcasm, plays pranks, or tells jokes, which distracts from the overall functioning of the group. In short, the joker is an incompetent tension releaser. Rather than being seen as the witty group member with good timing, the joker is seen as the "class clown." Like the insecure compliment seeker, the joker usually seeks attention and approval because of an underlying insecurity. A group's leader may have to intervene and privately meet with a person engaging in joker behavior to help prevent a toxic or unsafe climate from forming. This may be ineffective, though, if a joker's behaviors are targeted toward the group leader, which could indicate that the joker has a general problem with authority.



Figure 10.2.2 Distracting

Unproductive Roles

There are some negative roles in group communication that do not primarily function to divert attention away from the group's task to a specific group member. Instead, these unproductive roles just prevent or make it more difficult for the group to make

progress. These roles include the blocker, withdrawer, aggressor, and doormat.

Role	Function
Blocker	Resists ideas
Withdrawer	Avoids participation
Aggressor	Criticizes or attacks
Doormat	Yields to others

Blocker

The blocker intentionally or unintentionally keeps things from getting done in the group. Intentionally, a person may suggest that the group look into a matter further or explore another option before making a final decision even though the group has already thoroughly considered the matter. They may cite a procedural rule or suggest that input be sought from additional people in order to delay progress. Behaviors that lead to more information gathering can be good for the group, but when they are unnecessary they are blocking behaviors. Unintentionally, a group member may set blocking behaviors into motion by missing a meeting or not getting his or her work done on time. People can also block progress by playing the airhead role, which is the opposite of the egghead role discussed earlier. An airhead skirts his or her responsibilities by claiming ignorance when he or she actually understands or intentionally performs poorly on a task so the other group members question his or her intellectual abilities to handle other tasks (Cragan & Wright, 1999). Since exhibiting airhead behaviors gets a person out of performing tasks, they can also be a tactic of a withdrawer, which we will discuss next.

Withdrawer

A withdrawer mentally and/or physically removes herself or himself from group activities and only participates when forced to. When groups exceed five members, the likelihood of having a member exhibit withdrawer behaviors increases. For example, a member may attend meetings and seemingly pay attention but not contribute to discussions or not volunteer to take on tasks, instead waiting on other members to volunteer first. Withdrawers are often responsible for the social loafing that makes other group members dread group work. A member may also avoid eye contact with other group members, sit apart from the group, or orient his or her body away from the group to avoid participation. Withdrawers generally do not exhibit active listening behaviors. At the extreme, a group member may stop attending group meetings completely. Adopting a problem-solving model that requires equal participation, starting to build social cohesion early, and choosing a meeting space and seating arrangement that encourages interactivity can help minimize withdrawing behaviors. Gatekeepers, supporters, and group leaders can also intervene after early signs of withdrawing to try to reengage the group member.

Aggressor

An aggressor exhibits negative behaviors such as putting others' ideas down, attacking others personally when they feel confronted or insecure, competing unnecessarily to "win" at the expense of others within the group, and being outspoken to the point of distraction. An aggressor's behaviors can quickly cross the fine line between being abrasive or dominant and being unethical. For example, a person vigorously defending a position that is relevant and valid is different from a person who claims others' ideas are stupid but has nothing to contribute. As with most behaviors, the aggressor's fall into a continuum based on their intensity. On the more benign end of the continuum is assertive behavior, toward the middle is aggressive behavior, and on the unethical side is bullying behavior. Establishing group rules and norms that set up a safe climate for discussion and include mechanisms for temporarily or permanently removing a group member who violates that safe space may proactively prevent such behaviors.

Doormat

While we all need to take one for the team sometimes or compromise for the sake of the group, the doormat is a person who is chronically submissive to the point that it hurts the group's progress (Cragan & Wright, 1999). Doormat behaviors include quickly giving in when challenged, self-criticism, and claims of inadequacy. Some people who exhibit doormat behaviors may have difficulty being self-assured and assertive, may be conflict avoidant, or may even feel that their behaviors will make other group members like them. Other people play the martyr and make sure to publicly note their "sacrifices" for the group, hoping to

elicit praise or attention. If their sacrifices aren't recognized, they may engage in further negative behaviors such as whining and/or insecure compliment seeking.

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10.3: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the common components and characteristics of problems.
- Explain the five steps of the group problem-solving process.
- Describe the brainstorming and discussion that should take place before the group makes a decision.
- Compare and contrast the different decision-making techniques.
- Discuss various influences on decision making.

Although the steps of problem solving and decision making that we will discuss next may seem obvious, we often don't think to or choose not to use them. Instead, we start working on a problem and later realize we are lost and have to backtrack. I'm sure we've all reached a point in a project or task and had the "OK, now what?" moment. In this section, we will discuss the group problem-solving process, methods of decision making, and influences on these processes.

Group Problem Solving

The problem-solving process involves thoughts, discussions, actions, and decisions that occur from the first consideration of a problematic situation to the goal. The problems that groups face are varied, but some common problems include budgeting funds, raising funds, planning events, addressing customer or citizen complaints, creating or adapting products or services to fit needs, supporting members, putting together a presentation, and raising awareness about issues or causes.

Problems of all sorts have three common components:

1. **An undesirable situation.** When conditions are desirable, there isn't a problem.
2. **A desired situation.** Even though it may only be a vague idea, there is a drive to better the undesirable situation. The vague idea may develop into a more precise goal that can be achieved, although solutions are not yet generated.
3. **Obstacles between undesirable and desirable situation.** These are things that stand in the way between the current situation and the group's goal of addressing it. This component of a problem requires the most work, and it is the part where decision making occurs. Some examples of obstacles include limited funding, resources, personnel, time, or information. Obstacles can also take the form of people who are working against the group, including people resistant to change or people who disagree (Adams & Galanes, 2009).

Discussion of these three elements of a problem helps the group tailor its problem-solving process, as each problem will vary. While these three general elements are present in each problem, the group should also address specific characteristics of the problem. Five common and important characteristics to consider are task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group member interest in problem, group member familiarity with problem, and the need for solution acceptance (Adams & Galanes, 2009).

1. **Task difficulty.** Difficult tasks are also typically more complex. Groups should be prepared to spend time researching and discussing a difficult and complex task in order to develop a shared foundational knowledge. This typically requires individual work outside of the group and frequent group meetings to share information. This is common in group presentations.
2. **Number of possible solutions.** There are usually multiple ways to solve a problem or complete a task, but some problems have more potential solutions than others. Figuring out how to prepare a beach house for an approaching hurricane is fairly complex and difficult, but there are still a limited number of things to do—for example, taping and boarding up windows; turning off water, electricity, and gas; trimming trees; and securing loose outside objects. Other problems may be more creatively based. For example, putting together a relevant and interesting group presentation entails specifics as well as engaging in creative options.
3. **Group member interest in problem.** When group members are interested in the problem, they will be more engaged with the problem-solving process and invested in finding a quality solution. Groups with high interest in and knowledge about the problem may want more freedom to develop and implement solutions, while groups with low interest may prefer a leader who provides structure and direction.
4. **Group familiarity with problem.** Some groups encounter a problem regularly, while other problems are more unique or

unexpected. A family who has lived in hurricane alley for decades probably has a better idea of how to prepare its house for a hurricane than does a family that just recently moved from the Midwest. Many groups that rely on funding have to revisit a budget every year, and in recent years, groups have had to get more creative with budgets as funding has been cut in nearly every sector. When group members aren't familiar with a problem, they will need to do background research on what similar groups have done and may also need to bring in outside experts. For a group presentation for your communication class, your instructor can definitely serve as an "outside expert."

5. **Need for solution acceptance.** In this step, groups must consider how many people the decision will affect and how much "buy-in" from others the group needs in order for their solution to be successfully implemented. Some small groups have many stakeholders on whom the success of a solution depends. Other groups are answerable only to themselves. When a small group is planning on building a new park in a crowded neighborhood or implementing a new policy in a large business, it can be very difficult to develop solutions that will be accepted by all. In such cases, groups will want to poll those who will be affected by the solution and may want to do a pilot implementation to see how people react. Imposing an excellent solution that doesn't have buy-in from stakeholders can still lead to failure.

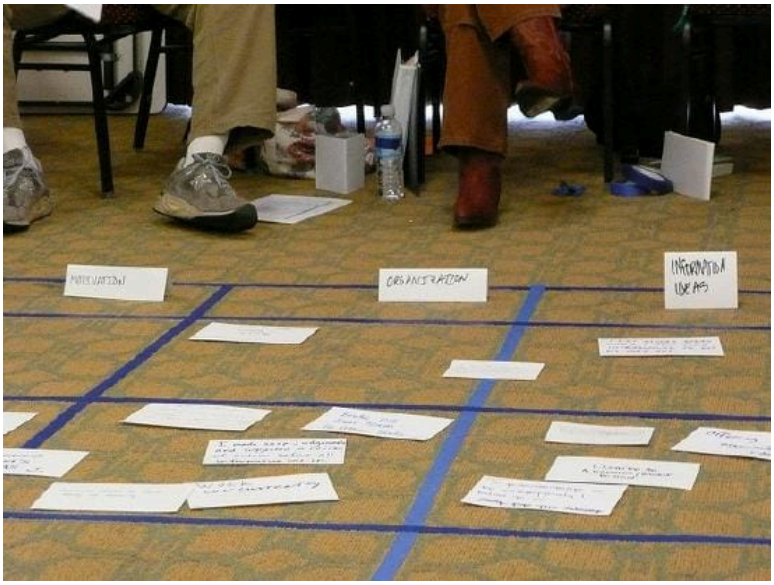


Figure 10.3.1 Group problem solving can be a confusing puzzle unless it is approached systematically.

Muness Castle – Problem Solving – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Group Problem-Solving Process

There are several variations of similar problem-solving models based on US American scholar John Dewey's reflective thinking process (Bormann & Bormann, 1988). As you read through the steps in the process, think about how you can apply what we learned regarding the general and specific elements of problems. Some of the following steps are straightforward, and they are things we would logically do when faced with a problem. However, taking a deliberate and systematic approach to problem solving has been shown to benefit group functioning and performance. A deliberate approach is especially beneficial for groups that do not have an established history of working together and will only be able to meet occasionally. Although a group should attend to each step of the process, group leaders or other group members who facilitate problem solving should be cautious not to dogmatically follow each element of the process or force a group along. Such a lack of flexibility could limit group member input and negatively affect the group's cohesion and climate.

Step 1: Define the Problem

Define the problem by considering the three elements shared by every problem: the current undesirable situation, the goal or more desirable situation, and obstacles in the way (Adams & Galanes, 2009). At this stage, group members share what they know about the current situation, without proposing solutions or evaluating the information. Here are some good questions to

ask during this stage: What is the current difficulty? How did we come to know that the difficulty exists? Who/what is involved? Why is it meaningful/urgent/important? What have the effects been so far? What, if any, elements of the difficulty require clarification? At the end of this stage, the group should be able to compose a single sentence that summarizes the problem called a problem statement. Avoid wording in the problem statement or question that hints at potential solutions. A small group formed to investigate ethical violations of college officials could use the following problem statement: "Our college does not currently have a mechanism for students to report suspected ethical violations by college officials."

Step 2: Analyze the Problem

During this step a group should analyze the problem and the group's relationship to the problem. Whereas the first step involved exploring the "what" related to the problem, this step focuses on the "why." At this stage, group members can discuss the potential causes of the difficulty. Group members may also want to begin setting out an agenda or timeline for the group's problem-solving process, looking forward to the other steps. To fully analyze the problem, the group can discuss the five common problem variables discussed before. Here are two examples of questions that the group formed to address ethics violations might ask: Why doesn't our college have an ethics reporting mechanism? Do colleges of similar size have such a mechanism? Once the problem has been analyzed, the group can pose a problem question that will guide the group as it generates possible solutions. "How can students report suspected ethical violations of college officials and how will such reports be processed and addressed?" As you can see, the problem question is more complex than the problem statement, since the group has moved on to more in-depth discussion of the problem during step 2.

Step 3: Generate Possible Solutions

During this step, group members generate possible solutions to the problem. Again, solutions should not be evaluated at this point, only proposed and clarified. The question should be what *could* we do to address this problem, not what s*hould* we do to address it. It is perfectly OK for a group member to question another person's idea by asking something like "What do you mean?" or "Could you explain your idea more?" Discussions at this stage may reveal a need to return to previous steps to better define or more fully analyze a problem. Since many problems are multifaceted, it is necessary for group members to generate solutions for each part of the problem separately, making sure to have multiple solutions for each part. Stopping the solution-generating process prematurely can lead to groupthink. For the problem question previously posed, the group would need to generate solutions for all three parts of the problem included in the question. Possible solutions for the first part of the problem (How can students report ethical violations?) may include "online reporting system, e-mail, in-person, anonymously, on-the-record," and so on. Possible solutions for the second part of the problem (How will reports be processed?) may include "daily by a newly appointed ethics officer, weekly by a nonpartisan nongovernment employee," and so on. Possible solutions for the third part of the problem (How will reports be addressed?) may include "by a newly appointed ethics committee, by the accused's dean, by the college president," and so on.

Step 4: Evaluate Solutions

During this step, solutions can be critically evaluated based on their credibility, completeness, and worth. Once the potential solutions have been narrowed based on more obvious differences in relevance and/or merit, the group should analyze each solution based on its potential effects—especially negative effects. Groups that are required to report the rationale for their decision or whose decisions may be subject to public scrutiny would be wise to make a set list of criteria for evaluating each solution. Additionally, solutions can be evaluated based on how well they fit with the group's charge and the abilities of the group. To do this, group members may ask, "Does this solution live up to the original purpose or mission of the group?" and "Can the solution actually be implemented with our current time/resource/people restraints?" and "How will this solution be supported, funded, enforced, and assessed?" Secondary tensions and substantive conflict, two concepts discussed earlier, emerge during this step of problem solving, and group members will need to employ effective critical thinking and listening skills.

Decision making is part of the larger process of problem solving and it plays a prominent role in this step. While there are several fairly similar models for problem solving, there are many varied decision-making techniques that groups can use. For example, to narrow the list of proposed solutions, group members may decide by majority vote, by weighing the pros and cons, or by discussing them until a consensus is reached. There are also more complex decision-making models like the "six hats method," which we will discuss later. Once the final decision is reached, the group leader or facilitator should confirm that the group is in agreement. It may be beneficial to let the group break for a while or even to delay the final decision until a later meeting to allow people time to evaluate it outside of the group context.

Step 5: Implement and Assess the Solution

Implementing the solution requires some advanced planning, and it should not be rushed unless the group is operating under strict time restraints or delay may lead to some kind of harm. Although some solutions can be implemented immediately, others may take days, months, or years. As was noted earlier, it may be beneficial for groups to poll those who will be affected by the solution as to their opinion of it or even to do a pilot test to observe the effectiveness of the solution and how people react to it. Before implementation, groups should also determine how and when they would assess the effectiveness of the solution by asking, "How will we know if the solution is working or not?" Since solution assessment will vary based on whether or not the group is disbanded, groups should also consider the following questions: If the group disbands after implementation, who will be responsible for assessing the solution? If the solution fails, will the same group reconvene or will a new group be formed?

Certain elements of the solution may need to be delegated out to various people inside and outside the group. Group members may also be assigned to implement a particular part of the solution based on their role in the decision making or because it connects to their area of expertise. Likewise, group members may be tasked with publicizing the solution or "selling" it to a particular group of stakeholders. Last, the group should consider its future. In some cases, the group will get to decide if it will stay together and continue working on other tasks or if it will disband. In other cases, outside forces determine the group's fate.

Decision Making in Groups

We all engage in personal decision making daily, and we all know that some decisions are more difficult or significant than others. When we make decisions in groups, we face some challenges that we do not face in our personal decision making, but we also stand to benefit from some advantages of group decision making (Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). Group decision making can appear fair and democratic but really only be a gesture that covers up the fact that certain group members or the group leader have already decided. Group decision making also takes more time than individual decisions and can be burdensome if some group members do not do their assigned work, divert the group with self-centered or unproductive role behaviors, or miss meetings. Conversely, though, group decisions are often more informed, since all group members develop a shared understanding of a problem through discussion and debate. The shared understanding may also be more complex and deep than what an individual would develop, because the group members are exposed to a variety of viewpoints that can broaden their own perspectives. Group decisions also benefit from synergy, one of the key advantages of group communication that we discussed earlier. Most groups do not use a specific method of decision making, perhaps thinking that they'll work things out as they go. This can lead to unequal participation, social loafing, premature decisions, prolonged discussion, and a host of other negative consequences. So in this section we will learn some practices that will prepare us for good decision making and some specific techniques we can use to help us reach a final decision.

Brainstorming before Decision Making

Before groups can make a decision, they need to generate possible solutions to their problem. The most commonly used method is brainstorming, although most people don't follow the recommended steps of brainstorming. As you'll recall, brainstorming refers to the quick generation of ideas free of evaluation.

> The originator of the term **brainstorming** said the following four rules must be followed for the technique to be effective (Osborn, 1959):
>
> 1. Evaluation of ideas is forbidden.
> 2. Wild and crazy ideas are encouraged.
> 3. Quantity of ideas, not quality, is the goal.
> 4. New combinations of ideas presented are encouraged.

To make brainstorming more of a decision-making method rather than an idea-generating method, group communication scholars have suggested additional steps that precede and follow brainstorming (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

1. **Do a warm-up brainstorming session.** Some people are more apprehensive about publicly communicating their ideas than others are, and a warm-up session can help ease apprehension and prime group members for task-related idea generation. The warm-up can be initiated by anyone in the group and should only go on for a few minutes. To get things started, a person

could ask, “If our group formed a band, what would we be called?” or “What other purposes could a mailbox serve?” In the previous examples, the first warm up gets the group’s more abstract creative juices flowing, while the second focuses more on practical and concrete ideas.
2. **Do the actual brainstorming session.** This session shouldn’t last more than thirty minutes and should follow the four rules of brainstorming mentioned previously. To ensure that the fourth rule is realized, the facilitator could encourage people to piggyback off each other’s ideas.
3. **Eliminate duplicate ideas.** After the brainstorming session is over, group members can eliminate (without evaluating) ideas that are the same or very similar.
4. **Clarify, organize, and evaluate ideas.** Before evaluation, see if any ideas need clarification. Then try to theme or group ideas together in some orderly fashion. Since “wild and crazy” ideas are encouraged, some suggestions may need clarification. If it becomes clear that there isn’t really a foundation to an idea and that it is too vague or abstract and can’t be clarified, it may be eliminated. As a caution though, it may be wise to not throw out off-the-wall ideas that are hard to categorize and to instead put them in a miscellaneous or “wild and crazy” category.

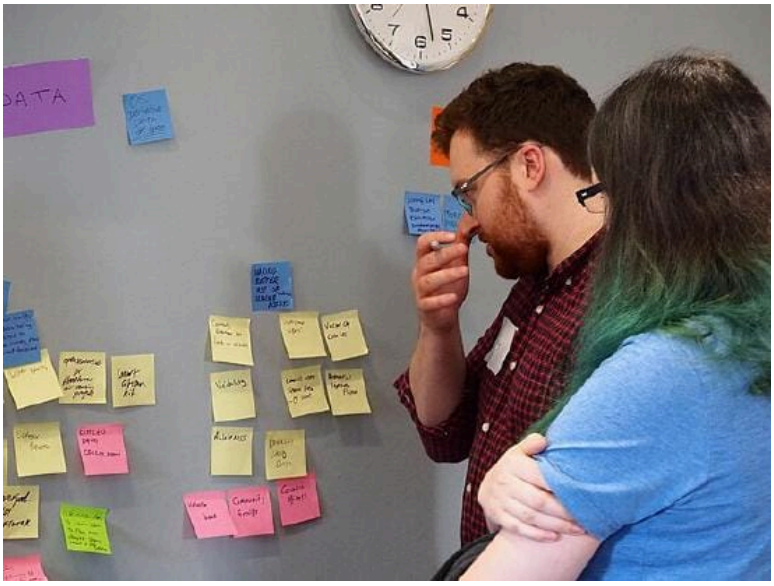


Figure 10.3.2 Brainstorming Session

Discussion Before Decision Making

The nominal group technique guides decision making through a four-step process that includes idea generation and evaluation and seeks to elicit equal contributions from all group members (Delbecq & Ven de Ven, 1971). This method is useful because the procedure involves all group members systematically, which fixes the problem of uneven participation during discussions. Since everyone contributes to the discussion, this method can also help reduce instances of social loafing. To use the nominal group technique, do the following:

1. Silently and individually list ideas.
2. Create a master list of ideas.
3. Clarify ideas as needed.
4. Take a secret vote to rank group members’ acceptance of ideas.

During the first step, have group members work quietly, in the same space, to write down every idea they have to address the task or problem they face. This shouldn’t take more than twenty minutes. Whoever is facilitating the discussion should remind group members to use brainstorming techniques, which means they shouldn’t evaluate ideas as they are generated. Ask group members to remain silent once they’ve finished their list so they do not distract others.

During the second step, the facilitator goes around the group in a consistent order asking each person to share one idea at a time. As the idea is shared, the facilitator or recorder records it on a master list that everyone can see. Keep track of how many times each idea comes up, as that could be an idea that warrants more discussion. Continue this process until all the ideas have

been shared. As a note to facilitators, some group members may begin to edit their list or self-censor when asked to provide one of their ideas. To limit a person's apprehension with sharing his or her ideas and to ensure that each idea is shared, the leader can ask group members to exchange lists with someone else so they can share ideas from the list they receive without fear of being personally judged.

During step three, the facilitator should note that group members can now ask for clarification on ideas on the master list. Do not let this discussion stray into evaluation of ideas. To help avoid an unnecessarily long discussion, it may be useful to go from one person to the next to ask which ideas need clarifying and then go to the originator(s) of the idea in question for clarification.

During the fourth step, members use a voting ballot to rank the acceptability of the ideas on the master list. If the list is long, you may ask group members to rank only their top five or so choices. The facilitator then takes up the secret ballots and reviews them in a random order, noting the rankings of each idea. Ideally, the highest ranked ideas can then be discussed. The nominal group technique does not carry a group all the way through to the point of decision; rather, it sets the group up for a roundtable discussion or use of some other method to evaluate the merits of the top ideas.

Specific Decision-Making Techniques

Some decision-making techniques involve determining a course of action based on the level of agreement among the group members. These methods include majority, expert, authority, and consensus rule. Table 14.1 "Pros and Cons of Agreement-Based Decision-Making Techniques" reviews the pros and cons of each of these methods.



Figure 10.3.3 Majority rule is a simple method of decision making based on voting. In most cases a majority is considered half plus one.

Becky McCray – Voting – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Majority rule is a commonly used decision-making technique in which a majority (one-half plus one) must agree before a decision is made. A show-of-hands vote, a paper ballot, or an electronic voting system can determine the majority choice. Many decision-making bodies, including the US House of Representatives, Senate, and Supreme Court, use majority rule to make decisions, which shows that it is often associated with democratic decision making, since each person gets one vote and each vote counts equally. Of course, other individuals and mediated messages can influence a person's vote, but since the voting power is spread out over all group members, it is not easy for one person or party to take control of the decision-making process. In some cases—for example, to override a presidential veto or to amend the constitution—a super majority of two-thirds may be required to make a decision.

Minority rule is a decision-making technique in which a designated authority or expert has final say over a decision and may

or may not consider the input of other group members. When a designated expert makes a decision by minority rule, there may be buy-in from others in the group, especially if the members of the group didn't have relevant knowledge or expertise. When a designated authority makes decisions, buy-in will vary based on group members' level of respect for the authority. For example, decisions made by an elected authority may be more accepted by those who elected him or her than by those who didn't. As with majority rule, this technique can be time saving. Unlike majority rule, one person or party can have control over the decision-making process. This type of decision making is more similar to that used by monarchs and dictators. An obvious negative consequence of this method is that the needs or wants of one person can override the needs and wants of the majority. A minority deciding for the majority has led to negative consequences throughout history. The white Afrikaner minority that ruled South Africa for decades instituted apartheid, which was a system of racial segregation that disenfranchised and oppressed the majority population. The quality of the decision and its fairness really depends on the designated expert or authority.

Consensus rule is a decision-making technique in which all members of the group must agree on the same decision. On rare occasions, a decision may be ideal for all group members, which can lead to unanimous agreement without further debate and discussion. Although this can be positive, be cautious that this isn't a sign of groupthink. More typically, consensus is reached only after lengthy discussion. On the plus side, consensus often leads to high-quality decisions due to the time and effort it takes to get everyone in agreement. Group members are also more likely to be committed to the decision because of their investment in reaching it. On the negative side, the ultimate decision is often one that all group members can live with but not one that's ideal for all members. Additionally, the process of arriving at consensus also includes conflict, as people debate ideas and negotiate the interpersonal tensions that may result.

Table 14.1 Pros and Cons of Agreement-Based Decision-Making Techniques

Decision-Making Technique	Pros	Cons
Majority rule	• Quick • Efficient in large groups • Each vote counts equally	• Close decisions (5–4) may reduce internal and external "buy-in" • Doesn't take advantage of group synergy to develop alternatives that more members can support • Minority may feel alienated
Minority rule by expert	• Quick • Decision quality is better than what less knowledgeable people could produce • Experts are typically objective and less easy to influence	• Expertise must be verified • Experts can be difficult to find / pay for • Group members may feel useless
Minority rule by authority	• Quick • Buy-in could be high if authority is respected	• Authority may not be seen as legitimate, leading to less buy-in • Group members may try to sway the authority or compete for his or her attention • Unethical authorities could make decisions that benefit them and harm group members
Consensus rule	• High-quality decisions due to time invested • Higher level of commitment because of participation in decision • Satisfaction with decision because of shared agreement	• Time consuming • Difficult to manage idea and personal conflict that can emerge as ideas are debated • Decision may be OK but not ideal

Situational Influences on Decision Making

A group's situational context affects decision making. One key situational element is the degree of freedom that the group has to make its own decisions, secure its own resources, and initiate its own actions. Some groups have to go through multiple approval processes before they can do anything, while others are self-directed, self-governing, and self-sustaining. Another situational influence is uncertainty. In general, groups deal with more uncertainty in decision making than do individuals because of the increased number of variables that comes with adding more people to a situation. Individual group members can't know what other group members are thinking, whether or not they are doing their work, and how committed they are to the group. So the size of a group is a powerful situational influence, as it adds to uncertainty and complicates communication.

Access to information also influences a group. First, the nature of the group's task or problem affects its ability to get information. Group members can more easily make decisions about a problem when other groups have similarly experienced it. Even if the problem is complex and serious, the group can learn from other situations and apply what it learns. Second, the group must have access to flows of information. In this regard, group members' formal and information network connections also become important situational influences.

The origin and urgency of a problem are also situational factors that influence decision making. In terms of origin, problems usually occur in one of four ways:

1. Something goes wrong. Group members must decide how to fix or stop something. Example—a group member consistently is not following through with what s/he is expected to do.
2. Expectations change or increase. Group members must innovate more efficient or effective ways of doing something. Example—an English learner does not understand what the rest of the group members are talking about. The group's discussion needs to take that into consideration.
3. Something goes wrong and expectations change or increase. Group members must fix/stop and become more efficient/effective. Example—a group member's laptop crashes and s/he is not able to do research at home temporarily.
4. The problem existed from the beginning. Group members must go back to the origins of the situation and walk through and analyze the steps again to decide what can be done differently. Example—the group's topic for their presentation not relevant and/or interesting.

In each of the cases, the need for a decision may be more or less urgent depending on how badly something is going wrong, how high the expectations have been raised, or the degree to which people are fed up with a broken system. Decisions must be made in situations ranging from crisis level to mundane.

Personality Influences on Decision Making

A long-studied typology of value orientations that affect decision making consists of the following types of decision maker: the economic, the aesthetic, the theoretical, the social, the political, and the religious (Spranger, 1928).

- The *economic* decision maker makes decisions based on what is practical and useful.
- The *aesthetic* decision maker makes decisions based on form and harmony, desiring a solution that is elegant and in sync with the surroundings.
- The *theoretical* decision maker wants to discover the truth through rationality.
- The *social* decision maker emphasizes the personal impact of a decision and sympathizes with those who may be affected by it.
- The *political* decision maker is interested in power and influence and views people and/or property as divided into groups that have different value.
- The *religious* decision maker seeks to identify with a larger purpose, works to unify others under that goal, and commits to a viewpoint, often denying one side and being dedicated to the other.

In the United States, economic, political, and theoretical decision making tend to be more prevalent decision-making orientations, which likely corresponds to the individualistic cultural orientation with its emphasis on competition and efficiency. But situational context, as we discussed before, can also influence our decision making.



Figure 10.3.4

One Way Stock – Tough Decisions Ahead – CC BY-ND 2.0.

The personalities of group members, especially leaders and other active members, affect the climate of the group. Group member personalities can be categorized based on where they fall on a continuum anchored by the following descriptors: dominant/submissive, friendly/unfriendly, and instrumental/emotional (Cragan & Wright, 1999). The more group members there are in any extreme of these categories, the more likely that the group climate will also shift to resemble those characteristics.

- **Dominant versus submissive.** Group members that are more dominant act more independently and directly, initiate conversations, take up more space, make more direct eye contact, seek leadership positions, and take control over decision-making processes. More submissive members are reserved, contribute to the group only when asked to, avoid eye contact, and leave their personal needs and thoughts unvoiced or give into the suggestions of others.
- **Friendly versus unfriendly.** Group members on the friendly side of the continuum find a balance between talking and listening, don't try to win at the expense of other group members, are flexible but not weak, and value democratic decision making. Unfriendly group members are disagreeable, indifferent, withdrawn, and selfish, which leads them to either not invest in decision making or direct it in their own interest rather than in the interest of the group.
- **Instrumental versus emotional.** Instrumental group members are emotionally neutral, objective, analytical, task-oriented, and committed followers, which leads them to work hard and contribute to the group's decision making as long as it is orderly and follows agreed-on rules. Emotional group members are creative, playful, independent, unpredictable, and expressive, which can lead them to make rash decisions, resist group norms or decision-making structures, and switch often from relational to task focus.

Cultural Context and Decision Making

Just like neighborhoods, schools, and countries, small groups vary in terms of their degree of similarity and difference. Demographic changes in the United States and increases in technology that can bring different people together make it more likely that we will be interacting in more and more heterogeneous groups (Allen, 2011). Some small groups are more homogenous, meaning the members are more similar, and some are more heterogeneous, meaning the members are more different. Diversity and difference within groups has advantages and disadvantages. In terms of advantages, research finds that, in general, groups that are culturally heterogeneous have better overall performance than more homogenous groups (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999). Additionally, when group members have time to get to know each other and competently communicate across their differences, the advantages of diversity include better decision making due to different perspectives (Thomas, 1999). Unfortunately, groups often operate under time constraints and other pressures that make the possibility for intercultural dialogue and understanding difficult. The main disadvantage of heterogeneous groups is the possibility for conflict, but given that all groups experience conflict, this isn't solely due to the presence of diversity. We will now look more specifically at how some of the cultural value orientations we've learned about already in this book can play out in groups with international diversity and how domestic diversity in terms of demographics can also influence group decision making.

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11: PUBLIC SPEAKING

11.1: Public Speaking Overview

11.2: Audience Analysis

11.3: The Topic and Thesis

11.4: The Body

11.5: Introductions and Conclusions

11.6: Public Speaking Virtually

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11.1: Public Speaking Overview

Learning Objectives

- describe nature of public speaking
- explain the societal value of public speaking.
- explain the personal benefits to learning public speaking.
- apply the traits of a good speech in creating and presenting a speech.
- describe the general speech purposes.

The oldest form of public communication and the precursor to mass media is the simple act of one person rising and expressing their thoughts to the group. Public discourse is the foundation of society; it is how groups of people address and resolve differences collectively and peacefully. With the rise of democracy in Ancient Greece, the value of public speaking gained prominence. A citizen's ability to speak their mind in public was highly valued and a sign of civic engagement.

Although we have so many avenues to express ourselves, from in person to online, the ability to craft and share a thoughtful, intelligent message is still an important skill. For a person's career, civic involvement, and political engagement, becoming proficient in public speaking is a highly valuable.

Nature of Public Speaking

Public speaking has three striking characteristics that set it off from interpersonal communication and small group communication.



Figure 11.1.1: Presentation

First, **public speaking** is *the act of one person speaking to many*. Instead of focusing on an interactive nature, public speaking focuses on one person, the speaker, developing and presenting a message to a group of individuals.

Second, public speaking is a more formal presentation, meaning it is bound by specific strategies and techniques. Good public speaking requires more planning, development, and self-reflexiveness, than the other two contexts.

Third, in the other two contexts, we see all members communicating from a position of shared, equal responsibility. In public speaking, the speaker bears more responsibility as the message is one-directional, and the feedback the speaker receives from the audience is subtler, such as facial expressions, body posture, and fidgeting. Public speaking is still an interaction, just like interpersonal and small group, but the responsibility for success is less balanced with more responsibility being placed on the

speaker.

Value of Public Speaking

Given the fear that most people have of public speaking, it is reasonable to ask why we engage in such an intimidating process. The fear of public speaking is common, often ranked as one of the top fears we have. A Gallup poll from 2001 found that 40% of respondents listed public speaking as their greatest fear, second only to a fear of snakes. Given a choice, people preferred dying over giving a speech. Even with this high degree of anxiety, public speaking retains a valuable place in our culture for several reasons.

Societal Functions

Public speaking has a long, illustrious history in the United States. The very formation of the U.S. political system and society is firmly rooted in wise people speaking their minds in public settings, engaging in spirited debate and discussion, and working collaboratively to find the best path for the country. Our country is founded on the premise that individuals, working together, can govern themselves. Public speaking is the tool by which this process occurs.

Public speaking allows for the relatively quick dissemination of information to a group of individuals.

If a person has much to share with a group, presenting the information via public speaking can be a fast process. A classroom lecture is a typical example. However, a question that begs to be asked is how effective such dissemination is in achieving this goal. In lecture, approximately 5-15% of the material is retained by the student; hence, the speaker (the teacher in this case) must realize this limitation and be willing to use public speaking as a starting point, using other follow up methods to enhance retention of the information.



Figure 11.1.2: Apple Presentation

Public speaking allows individuals or groups to attempt to bring about social or political change.

We have a long history in this country of using our freedom of speech to change what we don't like. The women's movement and the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century, and the TEA party movement of the early 21st century are examples of such a process occurring. Individuals see something happening around them they do not like, and they use public speaking to make others aware of the problem and advocate a way to change the situation.

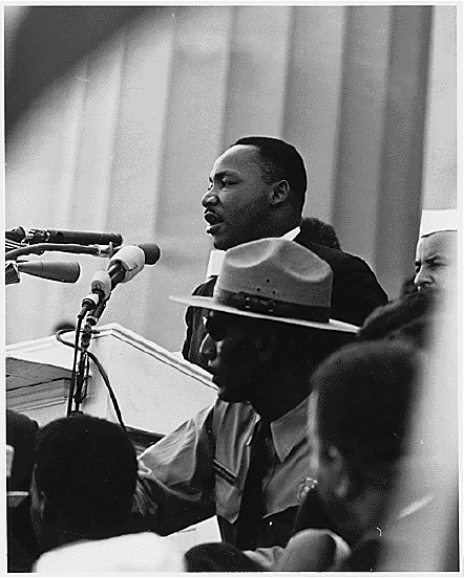


Figure 11.1.3: Martin Luther King Jr Speech

Public speaking allows communities to express common goals, concerns, and values.

We see speeches of commemoration at Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, and the Fourth of July. The speeches remind us of who we are as a nation, and they express common values. Attending a Sunday sermon is the same. Churches, mosques, and synagogues exist for a group of individuals to share common values and worldviews. The sermon is the central feature which pulls the community members together, the faith leader giving voice to that common world view.

Public speaking allows members of a democratic society, such as the United States, to actively debate issues of concern.

We tend to take for granted our First Amendment right to openly and clearly disagree with our governmental structures on issues of concern. We have the legal right, and obligation some would say, to speak out in opposition to those things with which we disagree. Except for advocating violence, we can speak out against our mayors, governors, and presidents, and no one has the right to squelch our voice. When we speak out in a public forum, we are participating in the process of self-governance by exercising our freedom of speech.

Personal Benefits

In addition, to the role of public speaking in our American society, becoming competent as a public speaker benefits us personally.

- **Managing Anxiety:** Given the anxiety about public speaking, and our need to confront and manage that anxiety, we build self-confidence. Accepting and working with our speech anxiety gives us experience in facing situations in which we are being judged and evaluated. Learning how to confront fear in public speaking gives us tools to use to confront fears in other situations as well.
- **Managing Our Self-Presentation**: We learn to monitor and manage our self-presentation. Since the vast majority of communication occurs nonverbally, a competent public speaker knows how to manage their entire physical package to present themselves most effectively, confidently, and powerfully. Just as with confronting our anxiety, being able to self-reflexively manage our self-presentation carries over into all aspects of our professional and personal lives. Although talent and ability is a significant part of career success, communication ability sets people off as especially competent and professional. The ability to engage in effective self-presentation can be a deciding factor in getting a job, being successful in the job, and advancing in our careers.
- **Packaging Information for Others:** We learn how to package information to benefit others. Good speakers are highly receiver-oriented. We are very concerned about giving thoughtful, well organized, easily followed, and engaging presentations. The ability to create messages fitting these standards will serve any of us well in a variety of professional and personal settings. Many people have good ideas, but not everyone can communicate them well to others. In public speaking, we learn how to package our message to best fit the audience we have at the moment.

"Good" Speeches

Unfortunately, for most people our exposure to public speaking has left us with a distorted view of what makes a "good" speech. Virtually anytime we ask a class, "What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of listening to a speech," the answer is "boring." This does not have to be the case; it is the job of the speaker to make choices that directly influence how interesting or boring a speech is going to be.As speakers, we have the obligation and ability to choose how effectively and dynamically we will present ourselves and the information to the audience. We can give interesting, dynamic, energetic, and engaging speeches. Each of us has experienced teachers who were boring and monotone, but we have also experienced teachers who were dynamic and energetic. The latter group *chose* to make the speeches (lectures) more interesting.

To make a speech more interesting and effective, we need to understand what makes a good speech:

- A good speech is well structured and signposted to enhance clarity and memory value. A good speech is organized and easily followed with clear, obvious transitions. Our job as speakers is to present a message clearly and thoughtfully, and clear structure facilitates that.
- A good speech sounds like "organized conversation." The phrase is meant to invoke the image of a speaker presenting naturally and comfortably; just talking to the audience, in an organized, easily followed manner.
- A good speech has a purpose, clear to the audience and to which the speaker adheres. Good speakers make their purpose clear and they fulfill that. They do not wander, drift about, shift purposes, or mislead the audience. They do not start off informing the audience, and then suddenly shift to persuasion.
- A good speaker is active, not passive. Too many speakers, especially novice speakers, tend to use the "open my mouth, let the words fall out" approach to speaking. This thoughtless approach to public speaking is not very effective. Good speakers make choices, determining throughout their speech the best strategy for the given audience. Through the preparation and practice process, we make decisions based on what we think will increase the likelihood of success. Such strategic thinking requires careful consideration of the topic, the audience, the speaker, and knowledge of the interaction of these three components.
- A good speaker works to create **immediacy** with the audience. Immediacy is *a sense of connection; that the speaker, the topic, and the audience are all working together*. Good speakers see a speech as a time to share a message with an audience, building a bridge between the speaker and the audience. Too often novice speakers see the audience as a barrier to success, a collective of judgmental individuals out to embarrass the speaker. However, that is simply not true of most audiences. Audiences want the speech to be good because it validates the time spent listening, it is more enjoyable, and it simply makes the time go faster. If a speaker taps into the audience's interests and personality, they can be quite effective in engaging the audience. Such engagement does not happen automatically; it is the result of thoughtful planning and preparation.

YouTube Video

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Video 11.1.1: Video 1 youtu.be/i0a61wFaF8A

The public speaking situation is quite different from interpersonal communication and small group communication. The degree of advanced planning, of conscious decision making, and of communicator responsibility is much higher when giving a speech. We have been taught when a person goes to the front of the room to speak, the speaker is now "in charge" of the event. We must meet that expectation, take charge of the event, and fulfill our responsibilities for success. Speeches are only as good as the audience thinks they are; the speaker must rise to the challenge of presenting a good speech.

Purposes of Speeches

When developing a speech, we need to know why we are speaking. Even before considering the topic, we need to know if our purpose is to inform, to persuade, to entertain, or if it is a special occasion.

Speeches to Inform

Speeches to inform are those in which we are aiming to enlighten or to further educate the audience, but in an objective, non-directive manner. We provide the information about the topic to the audience, but we are not directing the audience to believe, feel, or act in a specific manner.
There are three types of informative speeches.

- **Report speech**. A speech to report is *one in which we take a single body of information, analyze it for the important points, then present a summary of those important points*. This is common in a business setting. For example, if ACME Industries is considering making and selling a new product, various divisions will do research to determine the likelihood of the product being a success and profitable. Once this feasibility research is done and compiled into a single report, a single person or a group will then present the key findings to the management so they can decide on the course of action to take.
- **Demonstration speech**. These are classic "how to" speeches, usually arranged in a step-by-step pattern. For example, Mary may give a speech on how to be creative with Ramen noodles. She will progress, chronologically, through a series of steps the audience can then follow on their own.
- **Explanation speech**. Speeches of explanation are presentations drawing from multiple sources, designed to generally enlighten the audience about a given topic. They are not designed to show how to do something, but are for generally increasing the audience's knowledge about the topic. Instead of speaking on how to make Ramen noodles, Mary may explain how good nutrition aids classroom performance in college.

Speeches to Persuade

Speeches to persuade are those in which we are aiming to influence the audience in some fashion. They are subjective and highly directive. The speaker has a bias toward a specific belief, attitude, or action, and the speaker works to direct the audience in what to believe, what opinion to have, or what action to undertake.

In persuasion, the issue of ethics becomes paramount. Some students erroneously believe that speakers always have to give both sides of the issue to be ethical, but that is not true. When Lisa shops for a car, she knows the salesperson is out to persuade her to buy; thus, she expects messages designed to urge her to that action. As long as the salesperson gives accurate, verifiable, and truthful information, there is no ethical violation.

It is our job to provide the audience with the most accurate information we can find, and to present that information honestly, not distorting it. We must cite our sources to give due credit, and the topic should be one that can be justified as beneficial to the audience, not just to the speaker.

There are three types of persuasive speeches.

- Persuasive speeches to influence **beliefs**. A belief is *what we hold to be true or false*. For example, the knowledge that the Earth rotates around the sun is a belief; we believe it to be factual information. The idea that smoking can cause cancer is a belief. If we try to persuade the audience consuming too much fat can cause colon cancer, we are trying to get the audience to believe what is true or false about the impact of fat in our diets.
- Persuasive speeches to influence **attitudes**. We attempt to influence how an audience judges an event or idea; the speaker is trying to influence the audience's opinion of something. For these speeches, the speaker is attempting to make the audience think of the topic on a scale of good to bad, or desirable to not desirable. To argue the Governor of Minnesota is doing a good job (or a bad job) is an attempt to influence an attitude or opinion. With statements like these it is not a matter of true or false, black or white. It is a matter of placing the Governor on a range of opinion from highly positive to highly negative.
- Persuasive speeches of **actuation (or action)**. We try to get the audience to engage in a specific behavior. Advertising is a prime example. We are asked to have a positive opinion of a product, and then to act by purchasing.

The three types of persuasive speeches build on each other. If Yousef is going to give a speech of actuation calling for the audience to donate blood during Ridgewater College's annual blood drive, he will need to show the audience there is a need for blood (a belief), that donating blood is a good thing to do (an attitude), and how to participate in the blood drive (an action).

Speeches to Entertain

Although not commonly done in an introductory Communication Studies class, there is a third general speech purpose: a speech to entertain. We would hope all speeches are entertaining in some fashion, whether through humor, interest, or seriousness, so the audience found the speech engaging and intriguing. A true speech to entertain, however, is one in which the primary focus is to generate laughter. In other words, they are speeches intended to be funny.

These are still speeches in that they are organized, have a clear structure, and flow well, but they have as their overall goal the creation of laughter in the audience. The speaker usually has an underlying serious informative or persuasive point, but it is explored and developed through the use of humor. Commencement addresses, especially by those delivered by comedians or comic actors, like Tom Hanks, are typically structured this way. The speaker has a serious point to make but develops it in a humorous manner. These are common at events such as celebratory dinners or awards banquets.

Special Occasion Speeches







Figure 11.1.6**, Figure** 11.1.7**, Figure** 11.1.8**: Special Occassion Speeches**

A special occasion speech is just what the name states: speeches given at special events. This is actually a very common type of speaking. Special occasion speeches are designed to fit the specific event at which they are being given. While each one has its own unique guidelines, the key point is to develop the speech consistent with that occasion.

Special Occassion Speeches Include:

- **Eulogy**: a speech given at a funeral or memorial service to honor the deceased.
- **Introduction**: a speech given to introduce a speaker to an audience.
- **Toast**: a speech given honoring a person or group, such as a wedding toast.
- **Giving an Award**: a speech given to bestow an honor on a person.
- **Accepting an Award**: a speech given to communicate appreciation for an award.
- **Commencement:** a speech given at a graduation, typically addressing the past (the work done to acheive the goal) and the future (challenging the graduates to learn more, help others, get involved in social issues, or otherwise continue personal growth).

Generally special occasion speeches are fairly short and focused on the event at hand. Humor is commonly used, even with many eulogies, but only when appropriate for the event and audience.

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11.2: Audience Analysis

Learning Objectives

- use the three stages of audience analysis to determine the dynamics of a given audience.
- describe the core demographic characteristics of an audience.
- make inferences to describe the key traits of an audience.
- determine how to adapt an informative speech to an audience.
- determine how to adapt a persuasive speech to an audience.

A good way to think of developing a speech is to think of it like a puzzle. There are multiple pieces that all have to fit together, with the driving piece being the audience. The core of a good presentation is an understanding of the audience to whom the speech is targeted. We need to spend some time gaining an understanding of our audience which becomes the criteria to determine the best strategies and approaches to employ.

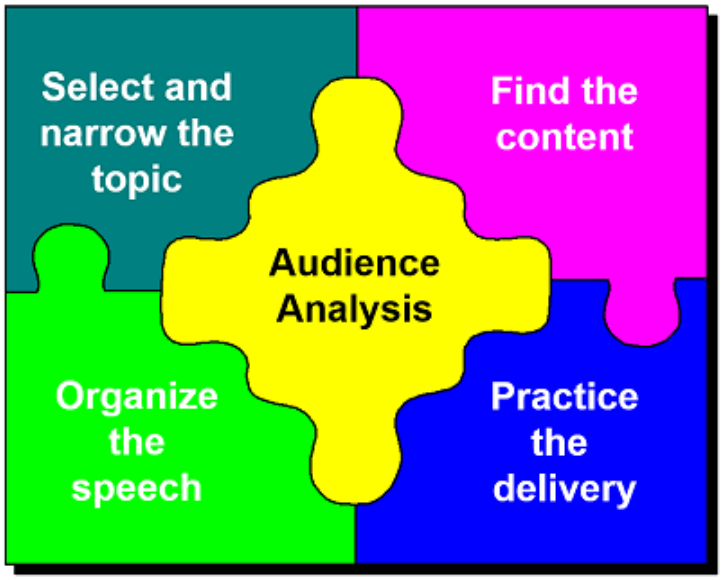


Figure 11.2.1: Speech Puzzle

The first stage, gathering information, can be as simple as observing who is in the audience, or can be a more involved process of formalized data collection. For classroom speeches, simply look around the room and determine some basic data, such as:

The first stage, gathering information, can be as simple as observing who is in the audience, or can be a more involved process of formalized data collection. For classroom speeches, simply look around the room and determine some basic data, such as:

- Average Age
- Gender Distribution
- Education Level
- Probable Income Level
- Relationship Status
- Parental Status



Figure 11.2.2: Audience



Figure 11.2.3: Audience

For situations in which the speaker is invited to speak, ask the person extending the invitation about the audience: Who are they? Why are they gathered? What are their expectations? With this basic information, we can move to the next stage, making inferences.

Making Inferences

At this stage, we are trying to get a handle on the audiences' collective "personality." To do this, we make **inferences**. An inference is *an conclusion based on evidence and reasoning*. An inference is not a guess; a guess is more random while an inference is based on specific bits of information. For instance, if it is December and the wind is blowing, those of us living in colder climates, like Minnesota, will infer, "It's cold outside." That conclusion is based on combining experience with bits of evidence to draw a reasonable conclusion.

We can do the same thing with audiences. Now that we have gathered some demographic data, we can move on and make inferences as to what the data tells us about the audience. The most any speaker can consider are the **common denominators**, those *things we believe are true of the vast majority of our audience members*.

For example, one common denominator is they are all in attendance for the speech. Why are they there? Are they attending because they came of their own free will, such as attending a religious service. Or are they in attendance because it is mandated by their job? Or is it somewhere in between, such as a college classroom, in which students voluntarily sign up for the class yet are required to attend by the instructor and didn't necessarily choose the topic? Knowing the basis of why they are there gives the speaker a sense of what the audience is expecting and the attitudes they are likely holding.

Adapting the Speech

The final step, adapting the speech, is the key to using an audience analysis to enhance the chance of success. It really does not matter how well we complete steps 1 and 2, if we do not take the information and act upon it, the speech is much less likely to succeed.

In adapting the speech, we are considering how to package the information for the audience; determining the best approach or strategy for accomplishing the speaker's goal. This does not mean the speaker must alter their core message. Instead, it means to take the core message and package it in a manner more interesting to the audience.

For example, if doing a speech on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to two audiences, 10th graders and college freshmen, the same basic information can be communicated, but it would be packaged differently. For the 10th graders, more formal, medical terms would be used, less humor would be used, and since the speaker needs to consider parents, the speaker should assume the audience is not currently engaging in intercourse. For the college audience, however, more lay terms could be used, more humor could be used, and the speaker could safely assume the audience members, in general, are more sexually active. Notice, the basic information does not change, but the packaging changes.

Everything in the speech should be considered as to its fit with the audience. What kind of attire is the audience expecting: formal, casual, or in-between? Is the audience expecting a very animated, active delivery with lots of movement and energy, or are they expecting a more subdued, more thoughtful delivery style? Is the language level to be formal and high level? Or is a more casual language level acceptable?

Which sources should the speaker seek out? For an audience with a lot of specific knowledge on the speaker's topic, higher level, very specific, highly qualified sources will be needed. For an audience with less specific knowledge, more casual sources may suffice. If informing an audience of physicians on the latest discoveries in the treatment of lung cancer, very specific medical research sources are needed. However, if informing an audience of college students on the same topic, general interest sources, such as newspapers or magazines, will be sufficient.

Everything in the speech must be considered in light of the audience. Some variables may arise as more important than others. For one audience, the quality of sources may be paramount to the success of the speech, yet for another audience, the quality of delivery may be most important. Through carefully considering the dynamics of the audience, a speaker can make self-reflexive choices to increase the chance of success.

Audience Adaptation for Informative Speeches

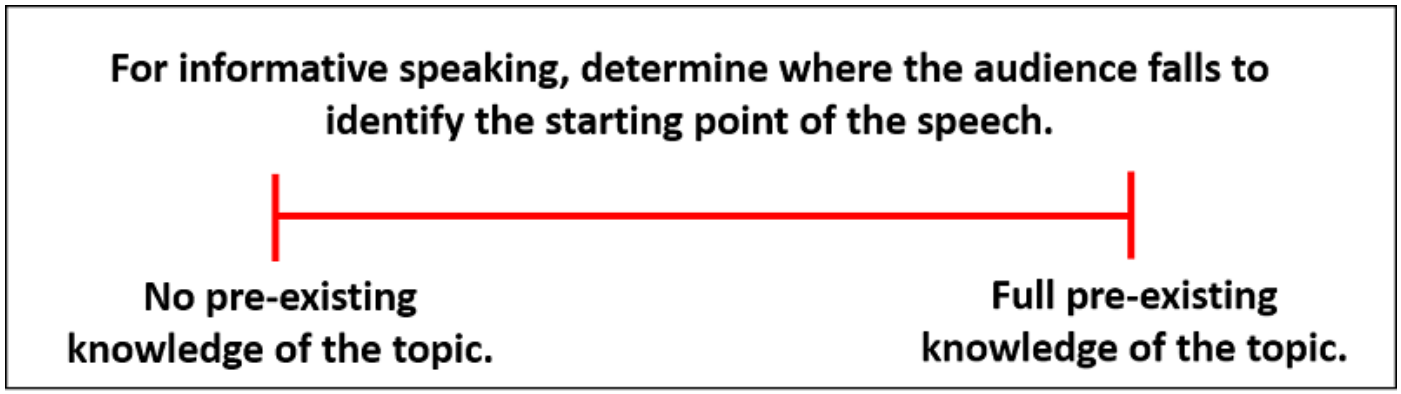


Figure 11.2.5: Informative Audience Interest

When adapting to an audience for informative speaking, it is vital we have some idea of where the audiences' existing knowledge is on the topic. Remember, If we were to compare individual audience members, we would find a range, but we have to aim for average or middle ground.

Once we have an idea of what middle ground is, we use that to determine where to focus the speech. We do not want to focus the speech below the audiences' existing knowledge level. If we do so, the audience may be bored or may even become offended, perceiving the speaker as being patronizing. Likewise, we cannot start the speech above the audiences' existing knowledge as they will not know what we are talking about and will not be able to follow the speech. They will not be able to make the leap from their existing knowledge to the starting point of the speech. The ideal place to start is at their existing level of knowledge, and then we move them forward.

Audience Adaptation for Persuasive Speeches

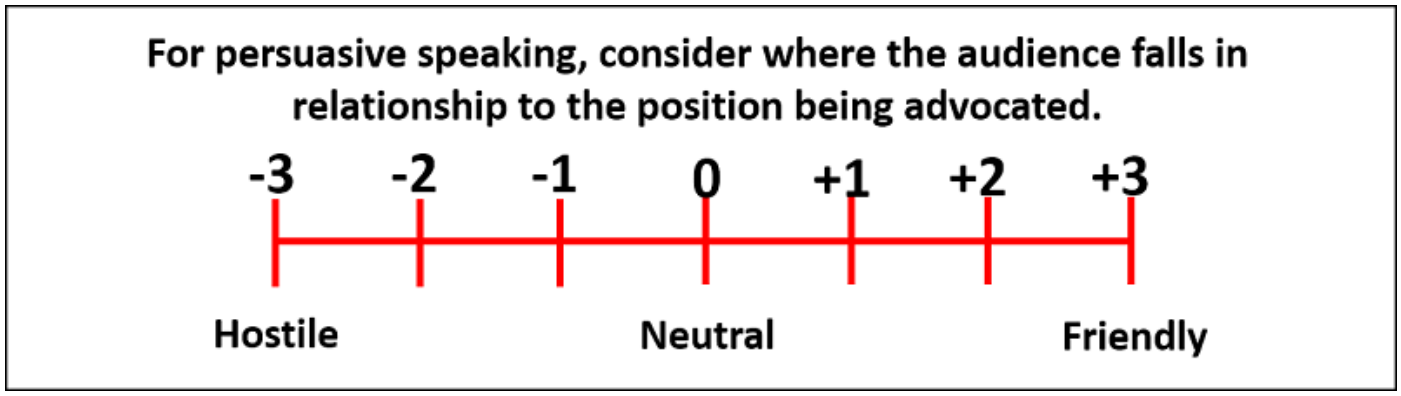


Figure 11.2.6: Persuasive Audience Interest

When adapting to an audience for persuasive speaking, it is vital the speaker have an idea of the audiences' existing attitude or position on the topic, and how that compares with the speaker's. As with any audience, we know the attitudes will range, but again we are looking for the *average* attitudinal position.
There are three general types of audiences for persuasion: hostile, neutral and friendly.

1. A **hostile** audience is one that already disagrees with the speaker's position. With a hostile audience, it is vital to know why they disagree because those are the reasons we need to address. If we do not address the key issues, the audience will be left holding their hostile position. The speaker also needs to consider how to approach the issues to avoid offending the audience. The speaker needs to respect the audience's position and tactfully offer a contrary position.

2. A **neutral** audience is usually a group who does not really know anything about the topic; they have yet to form an opinion on the topic. We have two jobs: "inform" the audience, and persuade them to accept our position. However, "informing" in this case will not be as objective as a pure informative speech would be. Rather, we introduce the audience to the topic in a manner consistent with the position we are advocating. Then we offer the audience reasons to accept the position being advocated.
3. A **friendly** audience is one who largely agrees with the speaker's position, but not completely. For these audiences, we must identify, as specifically as possible, why the audience is not in complete agreement, and then focus on those points of difference to move the audience to the position being advocated. For example, most people believe that donating blood is a good idea, yet only a fraction of those eligible actually donate. They are friendly to the idea, but they are not engaging in the action. The speaker needs to determine why they are not taking that final step and focus the speech in those areas.

Keep in mind that if the audience totally agrees with the speaker's position at the outset, there is little point in trying to "persuade" them as there is no place for them to move, nothing to change, since they already agree with the speaker's position. In this situation, we would give more of a motivational speech to remind the audience of their agreement with our position.

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11.3: The Topic and Thesis

Learning Objectives

- understand the steps of speech development.
- create a speech using the appropriate sections.
- apply topic selection criteria to the selection of a topic for an audience.
- develop a specific speech purpose.
- translate a specific speech purpose into a properly worded thesis statement.

Speech Development

Although there are "steps" to preparing a speech, a more appropriate way of thinking of speech preparation is as a dynamic process.

Instead of seeing speech development as a linear process, it is better to see it as a holistic process of creating all components of the speech so they fit together as an effective whole. A puzzle metaphor demonstrates this approach.

As the model illustrates, the core of this dynamic process is the audience analysis, and the speech is built around our understanding of our audience. We then develop the content (selecting the topic, finding the content, and organizing the speech), and prepare the content for presentation (practice the delivery).

Although there is a sense of a linear process, sticking to some sort of artificial step process is not as important as making sure that all the pieces fit together as an effective, unified whole. Although we may have developed one area, as we prepare the whole speech, we may need to revisit earlier parts of the process and alter those to achieve a unified whole.

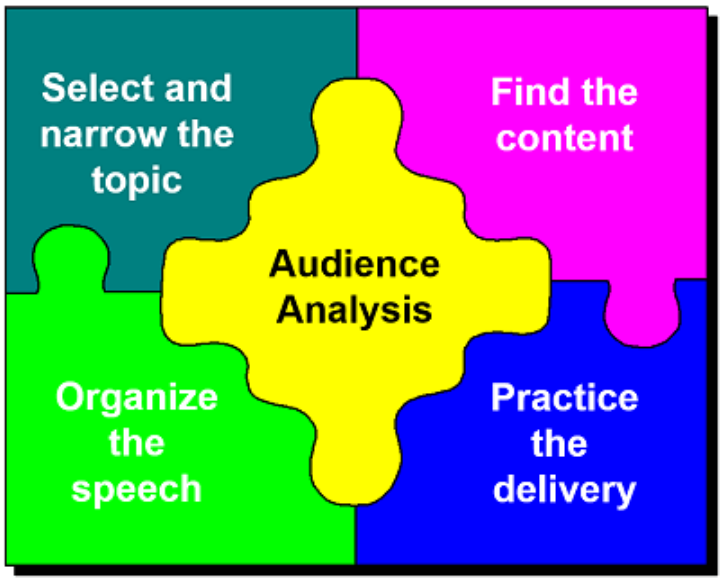


Figure 11.3.1: Speech Puzzle

Parts of a Speech

While there are a variety of ways to organize a speech, the most common structure breaks the speech into three parts:

- Introduction
- Body of the speech
- Conclusion

Portions of the Speech

The introduction, ending with the thesis/preview, comprises approximately 10% of the speech. The body of the speech is about 85% of the speech, and the remaining 5% is the conclusion.

The percentages should be used as guidelines for the speaker, not as absolutes. The majority of the speaker's efforts should be focused on relating the core information or arguments the speaker needs to share and the audience is there to hear. Since the body of the speech contains this core information, most of the time should be spent in that area.

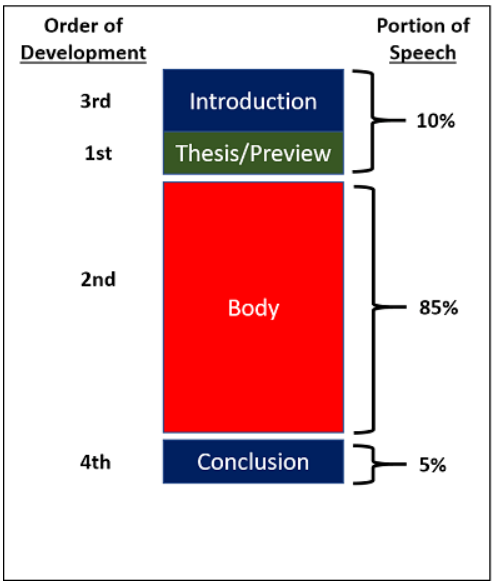


Figure 11.3.2: Speech Makeup

Order of development

In developing the speech, novice speakers often make the mistake of starting with the introduction. Since the introduction comes first, it seems logical to start there; however, this is wrong. Creating the thesis is the first step in good speech development. Until we know what the speech is about, we cannot effectively determine an introduction. Just as we cannot introduce a person we do not know, we cannot introduce a topic not yet developed. The most effective order of preparation is:

1. **Thesis.** Since the thesis defines what the speech is about and what it is not about, developing it first helps guide the speaker in developing the body, doing research, and staying properly focused.
2. **Body.** The body of the speech is the key content the audience is there to hear, so the speaker should spend a substantive amount of time researching, organizing, and fine-tuning this core content.
3. **Introduction.** A speech introduction is the most creative part of the process. Since it is intended to pull the audience into the thesis and prepare them for the body, by waiting until after developing the body, the speaker will have a clear sense of what the introduction should do. During research for the body, it is common to come across a quotation, example, or some other idea for the attention getting device of the introduction.
4. **Conclusion.** While it is the shortest part of a speech, it is very important as it is the last thing the audience will hear, leaving the audience with their final impression of the speech. This is developed last as there are ways to conclude a speech that are built on how the speaker begins the speech.

While this order of development is important, always remember the "puzzle" metaphor: we have to work to make all the parts fit together, so there can be a lot of revisiting parts to alter or fine tune them. Speech development is a dynamic process in which changing one part of the speech may have a ripple effect, affecting other parts. In the end, a good speaker makes sure that the

speech is consistent, coherent, organized, and flows well for the audience.

One of the most challenging steps classroom students face when given the classic speech assignment is to select and narrow a topic to fit the time limits of the assignment.

Topic Selection

Coming up with a topic “out of the blue” is quite difficult. Realistically, finding a topic for a classroom speech is far more difficult than finding one for a speech in a work or community setting.

The vast majority of presentations outside the classroom will be on topics in which the speaker is well versed and comfortable. If asked to speak, it will typically be to share knowledge within their field of expertise. If a business hires a Communication Studies instructor to present at a training session, they are clearly hiring them for expertise in communication. Even then, the speaker still has a responsibility to narrow to a specific topic, to adapt it to their audience and the occasion, and to fit the time limits. So outside of the initial step, determining the overall subject, speakers still have to go through the topic development process.



Figure 11.3.3: Speech Example

Topic Selection Criteria

In selecting a topic, one of the most common mistakes novice speakers make to take a sender-based approach. This is assuming the audience has a strong interest in the same things the speaker feels passionate about. Just because a speaker may be deeply into video gaming does not inherently mean the audience shares that interest. To select a good topic, the speaker needs to be receiver-based and objectively consider what is most likely to be successful. While the speaker’s interest can certainly serve as a good starting point to identify a general topic, the specific topic and approach to the topic must be carefully considered.

There are four criteria to determine the appropriateness of a topic:

1. **Audience Interest**
   We need to select a topic we think will appeal to the specific audience. This may be a topic we know the audience will have an immediate interest in, or one in which the audience will have an interest once we develop the topic to some degree. Being receiver-based, the speaker must be honest in their assessment of the topic and the audience, careful not to project their own interests on the audience.
2. **Speaker Interest**
   Although audience interest is certainly key, the speaker must also have an interest in the topic. A lack of speaker interest can be deadly. If the speaker is unmotivated to develop and present the speech, the speech usually sounds as if the speaker is bored and does not care. The speaker loses their own sense of desire to do a good job. A good topic is one that has a

healthy balance of audience interest and speaker interest.

3. **Occasion Appropriateness**
   We need to consider why the audience is gathered and select a topic that fits the occasion. If the audience is gathered at a business conference, learning new ways of interacting with clients, an informative topic on some aspect of communication skill may be appropriate. For a commencement address, talking about the dire state of the economy may not fit the celebratory nature of the event; the topic should invoke growth, opportunity, and an optimistic future. We want our topic to complement the reason the audience is gathered.
4. **Time Limits**
   The speaker must fit the speech into the given time limits. The speech needs to fill the allotted time, and yet it cannot exceed that given time. It is a core speaker responsibility to treat the audience with respect and to fill those time limits appropriately. Exceeding time limits is simply not an option. If a topic cannot be covered within a given time, the speaker has two options: limit the topic, or get a new topic.

Narrowing a Topic

Since the speaker needs to fit the speech into the allotted time, we need to move from a broader topic to a narrower, much more specific topic. Finding a specific topic is a process of analysis, selection, and narrowing. The goal of the process is to find a specific topic that fits the same criteria as discussed above: audience interest; speaker interest; occasion appropriateness; and time limits.

A good way to narrow the topic is to start with a broader topic and brainstorm a large list of sub-topics. Using the previous four criteria, narrow the topic to the best fit. If the topic is still too large, repeat the process as often as needed to reach a manageable size topic.

Specific Speech Purpose

After finding that specific topic, develop the **specific speech purpose**. The specific speech purpose *is the narrow, focused direction the speech will be taking*. The function of the specific speech purpose is twofold: to identify what goes in the speech, and to identify what does *not* go in the speech. The specific speech purpose establishes the parameters of the speech. We use the parameters as guidance as to what to include in the speech and what to keep out of the speech. This is an important consideration. Unless the speaker keeps a tight rein on the development of the speech, the speech can get out of control, suddenly diverting into a different area or expanding beyond the time limit.

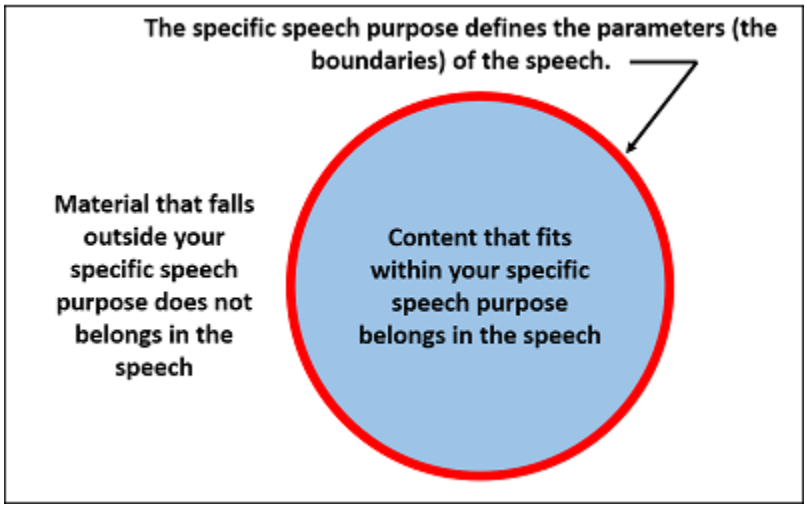


Figure 11.3.4: Specific Purpose

Example 11.3.1

For example:

- After listening to my speech, the audience will be informed of how to write an effective resume.
- After listening to my speech, the audience will be informed of alternative forms of financial aid.
- After listening to my speech, the audience will be informed of creative ways of using macaroni and cheese.

For persuasion, the specific speech purposes would be slightly different, reflecting the idea of changing an audience's belief, attitude, or action:

- After listening to my speech, the audience will be persuaded to donate blood.
- After listening to my speech, the audience will be persuaded to vote for the school referendum.
- After listening to my speech, the audience will be persuaded to use a designated driver.

The Thesis

Once the specific speech purpose has been developed, we can easily create the **thesis**. The thesis is *the specific, concise statement of intent for the speech*. It is the one, single sentence clearly stating exactly what the speech will be addressing. Converting the specific speech purpose to the thesis is simple:

"After listening to my speech, the audience will be informed of how to write an effective resume."

becomes

"Today I'll take you through the steps of writing an effective resume."

"After listening to my speech, the audience will be informed of alternative forms of financial aid."

becomes

"There are several alternate forms of financial aid for you to consider."

"After listening to my speech, the audience will be informed of creative ways of using macaroni and cheese."

becomes

"I'll show you several creative ways of using macaroni and cheese."

"After listening to my speech, the audience will be persuaded to donate blood."

becomes

"Today I'll show you why it is important that you donate blood."

"After listening to my speech, the audience will be persuaded to vote for the school referendum."

becomes

"Voting for the upcoming school referendum is important for the success of our schools."

" After listening to my speech, the audience will be persuaded to use a designated driver."

> **becomes**
>
> "When you go out partying, you should use a designated driver.

There are several traits of a good speech thesis:

- **Concise**. The thesis is a simple, straightforward sentence clearly telling the audience what the speech is going to be about.
- **Grammatically simple**. There is one subject and one predicate; it is not a compound sentence, nor a compound-complex sentence. The thesis is not a question.
- **Blatant**. A speech thesis is more blunt and obvious than what we might use in writing.
- **Identifies the parameters of the speech**. It tells the audience what the speaker will be doing; which, by definition, also tells the audience what the speaker is not doing.
- **Consistent with the speaker's overall speech purpose**. The wording reflects the proper informative or persuasive tone.

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11.4: The Body

Learning Objectives

- explain the difference between writing a speech and constructing a speech.
- determine main points for a thesis.
- explain the importance of clear organization.
- use the appropriate pattern of arrangement for the body of the speech.
- use subordination and coordination to organize the body of the speech.
- incorporate transitions.

After doing an audience analysis, selecting a topic considering the audience's needs and interests, and creating the thesis, we need to develop the **body of the speech**. The body is the largest component of the speech, about 85 percent, and where we actually do what the thesis says. In the body, *the speaker gives the information or arguments necessary to fulfill the intention of the thesis.*

Most commonly, speeches are broken into 2-4 **main points**. Main points are *the major subdivisions of the thesis*. Having too many main points can be overwhelming to the audience; fewer main points are more manageable for the speaker and the listener. Imagine hearing a speaker say, "Today I want to review 14 types of financial aid." Chances are most audience members would feel a sense of dread over how long they assume the speech will be. If, however, that speaker groups those 14 types into 4, saying "Today I want to review four categories of financial aid," most would find the thesis far less overwhelming.

The Main Points

Main points have two key issues. First, the main points are *coordinate* with each other. The main points are of relatively equal importance, justifying them being set off as separate points. Second, each main point is part of the thesis, and once they are addressed, they fulfill the thesis. The main points are *subordinate* to the thesis; they fit within it and are part of it.

Image 1 is a generic sample of an outline demonstrating coordination and subordination. There are many different formats for outlines, so be aware that specific expectations for instructors will vary.

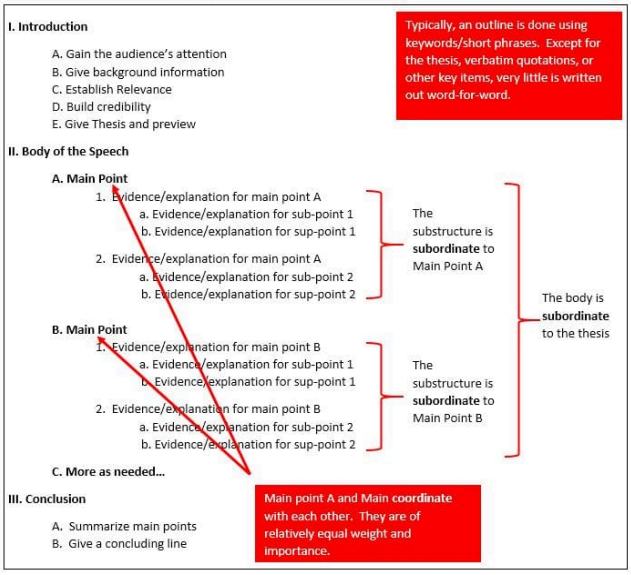


Figure 11.4.1: Example Outline

Organizing the Main Points

When developing the speech, an important step is to decide the order in which to present the main points. Speakers need to remember although they will have a thorough understanding of the content, they need to stop and think what will work well with the given audience. Just because the speaker is well versed in the information does not mean the audience will understand it clearly, unless the speaker presents it in a well-planned structure based on the audience's needs.

Clear organization is important for three reasons:

- It makes the information much more memorable for the audience. To remember information, we need it organized, and it is up to the speaker to provide the organization.
- It reduces the chance of the audience getting lost or confused. Once they are lost, it is very hard to get the audience back on track. Creating confusion is easy; reducing confusion is difficult.
- A well-organized speech is easier for the speaker to better recall the order of the ideas to be presented.

In ordering the main points, use a **logical idea development pathway**. The speaker considers *which order of presentation will be most effective with the audience in leading them to an understanding of the material*. There are no concrete rules about what does/does not work because it depends on the topic and audience, but there are some common ways to do this:

- Present the information **chronologically**. For a process speech, take us through it in time-order, e.g., first step, second step, etc.
- Present the information **spatially**. In describing a place, take us through it by location. For example, if describing vacation opportunities in Minnesota, dividing the state into southern, central, and northern Minnesota provides structure to the information.
- Present the information **topically**. Divide the speech into major subtopics, and order them in a logical pattern. Start from specific and go broad, or start broad and move to specifics. To inform about financial aid, perhaps start with the most common to the least common. Or for a speech on iPads, the speaker might begin with what an iPad is and how it developed, then on to the ways students are using them, and then look at some unique and different ways iPads are being employed.
- Use a **problem/solution** format. Show us the problem being addressed, and then lay out the solution that is being used or advocated. The problem/solution format is commonly used in persuasion. For example, if a student wants to argue that college textbook prices are too high, they might first explain why they are expensive, then offer an alternative to using traditional bookstore texts. The format can also be used for informative speaking if the purpose of the speech is to discuss a problem and how it was solved, not advocating a solution, just telling us about what others did.
- Use a **cause/effect** format. For speeches attempting to show two things are linked causally, tell us about the causes and the impacts of those causes. This can be used in either informative or persuasive speaking. For example, a speaker could inform an audience on how caffeine affects memory by discussing how caffeine works chemically and then how it interacts with the body. For a persuasive speech, the speaker could attempt to persuade the audience that artificial sweeteners are bad for a person using the same structure; talk about how they work and how they impact the body.

Regardless of how the speaker orders the main point, the goal is always the same, move the audience along an idea development pathway that is logical, easy to follow, enhances memory value and understanding.

The Substructure

The substructure of the speech is the content included within each main point. The substructure contains the actual information, data, and arguments the speaker wishes to communicate to the audience. Within the substructure, the speaker must continue to determine the best order for items to be presented so the speaker and the audience can follow the development of ideas. This is the core of the speech. How to use evidence and sources will be addressed in a later section.

Transitions

Transitions are a vital component of any good speech. Their role is to verbally move the audience from point to point, keep the audience on track, and to clearly lead the audience through the organization. It is important to have the audience on track from the start, and to keep them on track. If a reader gets lost, they can simply go back and re-read, but in speaking, if the audience gets lost, it can be very hard to get them back on track.

In public speaking, we like to use **signpost** transitions which are *blatant transitions*, such as “My second point is….” We are far less subtle in speaking than in writing.

There are five types of transitions we use in speaking:

"Today I will be telling you about some other forms of financial aid. I'll be looking at special scholarships, work reimbursement programs, and grants designed for individuals in special cases."

Note the thesis and the brief reference to the three main points. Another version of a preview is incorporated directly into the thesis. For example,

“Today I will tell you about three forms of financial aid you probably have not considered.”

Although not as detailed as the first example, it does let the audience know there are three main points to be covered. Regardless of which type is used, a key to a good preview is that it is not overdone, and merely mentions what is coming up. Do not over-preview.

- **Thesis/Preview**: This is a special transition used immediately after the thesis to preview the main points. Each point is briefly mentioned to let the audience know what is coming. For example,
- **Single Words/phrases:** These are general transition terms used throughout the speech, but mainly in the substructure. These include terms and phrases such as "also," "in addition to," "furthermore," "another," and so on.
- **Numerical terms**: Numbering is a common and very effective way to aid an audience in keeping track of a series of points. Terms such as "first," "second," and "third," can be very effective in clearly identifying major points. The major danger with these is their overuse. If a speaker uses numerical terms as transitions between main points, then uses them again in the substructure, the audience is likely to get confused.

“One type of alternative financial aid is special scholarships.”
“Another type of alternative financial aid is work reimbursement.”
“Another type of alternative financial aid is special grants.”

When heard back-to-back, they seem redundant. There will be discourse between the main point statements, so when they appear, they jump out as main point markers.

- **Parallel Structure***:* Parallel structure is mainly used as main point transitions. The main point statements are worded very similarly. Once the audience hears the similarly worded statements, they know they are moving into a new topic. For example, referring to the earlier example, the three main points could be worded as:
- **Summary/Preview:** Summary/Preview transitions are an excellent choice for moving between main points. At the end of the main point, the speaker says one sentence in which the first half summarizes what was just covered, and the second half previews what is coming up. For example, "Now that we have looked at special scholarships, we can move on and consider reimbursements you can get from your workplace." This is a very distinct, clean, and effective transition. Also, by stating the focus of the next main point, the speaker can now move directly into the sub-structure of the main point.

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11.5: Introductions and Conclusions

Learning Objectives

- use the Primacy-Recency Effect to explain the importance of introductions and conclusions.
- construct an introduction fulfilling the purposes of an introduction.
- select, develop, and use an attention-getting device.
- identify methods to build speaker credibility.
- employ methods to enhance speaker and topic relevance.
- develop a summary of the speech.
- employ a concluding method to end a speech.

Introductions

Regardless of how well developed the body of the speech is, the speaker has to be able to grab and keep the audience's interest. The speaker gets them to want to listen. How well a speaker starts and ends the speech will significantly affect how the audience attends to the message and remembers the message.

The Primacy-Recency Effect

Thinking back to chapter 2, the **primacy-recency effect** tells us that *we are most struck by and retain as most memorable the first and last things we experience about a situation, person, or event.* Primacy refers to the first things we experience. We know first impressions are powerful and long lasting. They are our primary experiences with others, and set an overall tone for what to expect from this person in later interactions. Since we are so strongly driven to make sense of the world around us, once we make an initial assessment of what a person is like, it is very hard to change those initial perceptions. In public speaking, the introduction is the primary, initial encounter with the speaker. The audience quickly forms powerful first impressions of the speaker and the speech itself.

We know from our understanding of perception that if our initial impression of something is positive, we then expect the subsequent experiences to likewise be positive. So if the introduction is strong, establishing a positive initial impression, the audience will assume the rest of the speech will be good. Since we are driven to find evidence affirming our expectations, the audience will tend to focus on the positive, minimizing the negative. The reverse is also true; if the beginning of the speech is poor, we then expect a poor speech, and we tend to highlight the speaker's mistakes to prove our assumption to be true.
Introductions are important because they establish expectations of what the rest of the speech will be like. Due to the primacy-effect, if the speaker establishes positive initial expectations, the audience is more likely to see the whole presentation positively; if the speaker establishes negative initial expectations, the audience is going to expect a poor overall speech.

The recency-effect also addresses conclusions. The conclusion is the last impression, and is often the lasting impression the audience has of the speech. By ending on a powerful note, the audience is more likely to take away an overall positive impression of the experience.

Introductions and conclusions are very important parts of the speech. Unfortunately, they tend to get far too little attention, being left to be quickly tossed together at the end of the speech development process. Instead, time needs to be spent on creating and practicing high quality introductions and conclusions.

The Purposes of the Introduction

Introductions have five purposes. In the initial 10% of the speech, the speaker wants to make sure they establish the best possible conditions for the reception of the body of the speech.

1. To Get Attention: At the beginning of the introduction, the speaker needs to verbally grab the audience so they are ready to attend to the message. We need to move the audience from not paying attention to focusing on us. Attention getting devices are

tools we use to accomplish this, and they will be addressed later in this section.

2. To Prepare the Audience for the Topic: Since the audience likely does not know what exactly the speaker will be addressing, the introduction can serve to start broadly and funnel the audience's thinking toward the specific thesis. This would also include providing the audience with any relevant background information to get them "up to speed," so to speak. For example, if the speaker is addressing drinking and driving, they might reference any recent alcohol related crashes in the area to aim the audience's thinking a specific direction. For informative speaking, since we want to start at the audience's existing knowledge and move them forward, the speaker may remind the audience of what they already know to prepare them to move forward. For example, "You already know the internet is just a large web of interconnected computers. But do you know where this all came from?"

3. To Establish Relevance: For an audience to really attend to the speech, the speaker needs to show the audience how the topic is relevant to them, their lives, or their concerns. The speaker needs to connect the topic to the audience in some manner. For example, "As college students, the web is a crucial communication tool. We use it to research assignments, for entertainment, and to connect with our friends. Since it is such a core part of our lives, it makes sense we have a better idea of where it all came from."

4. To Set Expectations for the Speech and Speaker: The introduction is the first moment in which the audience begins to establish expectations for the presentation. Two areas of focus are tone and speaker credibility. The introduction establishes the overall emotional tone for the presentation. If the speech is serious, the introduction needs to establish the need for seriousness; if the speech is lighthearted, the introduction needs to establish a humorous tone. It is very important the tone of the introduction is consistent with the rest of the speech. According to perception theory, the power of expectations causes us to focus on expected stimuli; when a speaker begins in a humorous tone, the audience will be looking for things to laugh at. When beginning in a very serious tone, the audience will expect a serious presentation throughout and may miss any attempts at humor.

The audience will also establish expectations for the speaker and develop a sense of the speaker's credibility. A strong beginning typically establishes positive expectations and high credibility, and a weak beginning has just the opposite effect. Consider the first day of class in a semester. Students go to a class, the instructor walks in, and in a manner of moments the students will make a series of assumptions as to the nature of that class. Because of perceptual influences, we know first impressions are difficult to change. Good speakers want to begin their speech with a sense of confidence, preparation, and audience-centeredness to establish positive expectations for the speech.

5. To Give the Thesis and Preview: At the end of the of the introduction, the speaker gives their thesis and preview, telling the audience specifically what the speech is about and how the speaker will approach the topic. As addressed elsewhere, a good thesis is concise, simple, and direct, and a good preview is brief and clear. At this point, the thesis/preview is not only telling the audience the specific purpose of the speech, it is also serving as a transition into the body of the speech.

Attention-Getting Devices

To get the audience's attention, we use attention getting devices. Attention getting devices, or AGDs, are techniques speakers use to grab the audience's focus and get the audience intrigued by what is coming up. They aim to get the audience to want to listen. There are a variety of attention getting devices, and they can be used singularly or in combination.

Questions

The speaker can use either responsive questions or rhetorical questions to gain the audience's attention. **Responsive questions** *ask for an actual response from the audience*. A "show of hands" is most commonly asked, but with smaller audiences could include verbal comments. Response questions can be extremely effective as they require the audience to become involved immediately, reducing the likelihood of them acting more passively. Important guidelines for asking a responsive question are:

- **Use the response**. When the audience responds to the question, incorporate the response immediately. Otherwise, the audience may be left wondering what the purpose was for the question. Even a simple phrase like, "That's about what I expected," acknowledges their input.
- **Use short questions.** If the question is long and involved, the audience will not be sure what they are responding to so they are less likely to respond if they are not sure. If needed, ask a series of short questions versus a single long, complicated one.
- **Use safe questions**. Consider where the audience is and what they would be comfortable disclosing in front of other audience members. For example, to ask a question such as, "How many of you have an alcohol problem" would be a very

unsafe question in most settings. Also, consider the wording. "How many of you have quit using illegal drugs?" is a bad question; there are only two possible responses: a) “I used to and now I do not,” or b) “I still use illegal drugs.” The wording of the question traps the audience.

- **Encourage the audience to respond**. Audiences will virtually always assume a question is rhetorical, not response. The speaker should either say something like, "I'd like to see a show of hands," or use nonverbal regulators, such as raising their own hand, or a combination of the two, to let the audience know they really want a response. Sometimes speakers need to be fairly blunt in encouraging a response.
- **Rhetorical questions** do not call for a specific response. They are asked *to trigger the audience to think in a manner consistent with the focus of the speech*. A good rhetorical question takes time and careful thought to develop. They can be deceptively simple. For example, if a speaker is going to argue against drinking and driving, to ask, "How many of you have heard of drinking and driving?" is not a good rhetorical question; it is too simplistic and obvious. Something like, "How many of you realize getting killed by a drunk driver is the most common form of death on a late Saturday night?" is more thought provoking and directed.

Narratives

The speaker tells a story or gives an example related to the topic. These can be very effective in that audiences tend to relate much better to stories about real people; such stories create a much greater sense of empathy and identification. For example, Jason might start his speech about pediatric nursing with a story from his sibling's experience with cancer. Emma could begin her speech about organic farming with the story of her family's work shifting from conventional to organic methods. If using a narrative, deliver it in a manner which "tells the story." Use vocal variety to aid the audience in imagining the seriousness or the humor of the situation. Giving a narrative in a flat, monotone style negates the impact of the story.

Quotations

The speaker can begin the speech by quoting another person. The quotation selected should be used because of its intriguing or insightful nature. As with testimony as evidence, the speaker can use lay, prestige, or expert quotations, and should always make sure the source is cited.

Some things to consider when using quotations:

- **Quoting verbatim.** While the speaker could paraphrase the quotation, typically opening quotations are given verbatim. The speaker needs a quotation that is worded well, or funny, inspiring, and ear-catching. The quotation needs to have a special quality that makes it meaningful and interesting for the audience. Quotations should be carefully introduced and cited. Speakers should avoid using a gesture to make "air quotes" while speaking.
- **Known source.** When selecting the quotation, if recognizing the source of the quotation is important, be sure the audience is likely to be able to do so. Years ago, a social commentator, Will Rogers, was well known. He was a forerunner of humorists such as John Stewart or Stephen Colbert, focusing on politics and current events. However, today virtually no one would know who he was, so even though his quotations might be quite relevant, given the audience does not know the source, using his words may not be as effective.

Startling Statements or Statistics

The speaker begins the speech with a statement that, for some reason, takes the audience aback and makes them want to hear more. Whether a statement or a statistic, it should be something that triggers interest and curiosity. However, it should not be shocking. Swearing, yelling, telling off-color jokes, or other over-the-top comments should be avoided so as to not create a barrier between the audience and speaker. A classic example of this approach goes as follows:

"Last year in the Sudan, over 10,000 people die every month from starvation. That's a very shocking number. Even more shocking is that you don't give a shit. What's more, you were more shocked when I said shit than you were when I told you 10,000 people were dying every month."

While it does use a mild expletive, the impact of the attention-getter is quite strong. Depending on the audience, such a startling statement and statistic could be quite effective, while other audiences may be too repulsed by the use of "shit." As with everything, appropriateness is all based on the audience.

Humor

An old adage says, "Always start a speech with a joke." This is absolutely wrong. Starting a serious speech on child abuse with a joke would be offensive, not engaging. However, if appropriate for the topic and audience, humor is fine, if the speaker is adequately prepared for what may happen. Specifically, the speaker needs to:

- **Make sure the humor is actually funny.** There is nothing more discomforting than watching a speaker attempting to make jokes they think are funny, and the audience is not responding. Preview the joke with a trusted friend, and urge them to give an honest opinion, and take their opinion to heart. Too often enthusiasm overrides thoughtfulness.
- **Be careful to not offend**. In today's culture of sensitivity to racial, ethnic, gender, and physical diversity, it is very easy to tell a joke that will offend someone in the audience.
- **The safest object of humor is the speaker.** Self-deprecating humor (making fun of oneself) is generally a safe tactic, as long as the speaker does not overdo the humor and impact credibility. While poking fun at oneself can be good, if taken too far it can suggest a lack of confidence in oneself or ones message.
- **Consider what to expect.** Often, the best humor elicits a chuckle, a smile, or other subtler responses. To expect boisterous laughter is usually unrealistic.
- **Be prepared for the humor to fail**. Be emotionally prepared for the audience to not laugh. If that happens, simply go on. Attempting to restate the joke or explain the humor emphasizes failure and makes the speaker look weak.

Reference to Audience/Occasion

The speaker can begin the speech by making a reference directed at the makeup, interests, or unique characteristics of the audience, or by making a reference to the event at which the audience is in attendance. For example, if giving a speech to college students on financial aid, a speaker may start by referring to the perpetual need for college students to find more money. When opening a commencement address, speakers often refer to the honor of being selected to speak at such an important occasion.

Building Relevance

The audience needs to have a sense of how or why the topic is relevant to them. In the introduction, the speaker should work to build a connection between the topic and the audience's needs or concerns. Relevance building has three pathways:

- **Refer to obvious relevance**. At times, the value of the topic to the audience is self-evident. Speaking to a group of parents of college freshman, a topic such as financial aid and paying for school is clearly relevant, so a brief reference to the importance of the topic should suffice.
- **Refer to a current but unknown relevance**. Quite common for classroom speeches, a speaker has a topic that is current and of value to the audience, but the audience may not be aware of the relevance. For example, if attempting to persuade a classroom audience to support a bill pending in the state legislature, until the speaker lays out the impact of the bill on the audience, they will not see the topic as relevant. When building relevance, the speaker can appeal to a serious need, like paying for college, or that something should be of interest, such as how to snowboard. Regardless, the speaker needs to make sure the connection between audience and topic is clear.
- **Refer to future relevance**. A more difficult task is to connect an audience to a topic that will be relevant to them in the future but is not relevant at the moment. This is a common issue for teachers, trying to convince students that learning the content will benefit them in their future. Regardless, it is the speaker's job to show the audience the value of the topic, even if the value is not realized until a later time.

Building Speaker Credibility

As mentioned previously, during the introduction, the audience is developing a perception of the competence and credibility of the speaker. It is very important to understand the speaker's credibility is something the audience gives the speaker. **Credibility** is *the audience's perception of the speaker's competence and believability*. The speaker needs to offer evidence to the audience the speaker is prepared, confident, and believable. Some ways to influence the audience's perception include:

- **Strong delivery**. Strong delivery factors can add significantly to communication confidence and assurance. These include:
  - Good eye contact

    - Clear, confident vocal factors
    - Open gestures
    - Skilled use of visual aids
    - Minimal anxiety displays
- **Content comfort.** Displaying confidence in the topic itself and being able to speak about it easily, without hesitation or uncertainty.
- **Use of sources.** One of the benefits of using sources is credibility transfer, when the credibility of the source cited becomes part of the speaker's credibility. Citing sources, especially ones the audience already holds as credible, will enhance the speaker's believability.
- **Personal experience.** When addressing a topic the speaker knows well, letting the audience know about that experience can influence credibility. For example, if Brittany is giving a classroom speech on the culture of South Africa, telling her audience she spent a year as an exchange student in Johannesburg lets us know she has relevant experience. When attempting to persuade an audience to become organ donors, Jack sharing a personal experience of a loved one receiving an organ enhances his credibility.



Figure 11.5.1: Speaker Example

Closing Your Speech

While the introduction establishes the overall tone and expectations for the speech, the conclusion provides the audience the lasting impression. The conclusion is about half the length of the introduction, with two primary purposes: to summarize, and to provide closure.

First, the conclusion offers a summary of the speech. In the introduction, the speaker previewed the points right after the thesis in a short, concise manner. Here, the speaker should *review* the main points, albeit in a slightly more involved manner than the preview. Remind the audience of the key points, but do not over-summarize. Generally, touch on what the main points were and, for a longer speech, some of the major sub-points. However, do not get so detailed that it sounds as if the conclusion is repeating the body of the speech. Do not make any new points in the conclusion. Gently remind the audience of what the speech addressed.

The second purpose of the conclusion is to provide closure which is more than simply ending the speech. Providing closure is to end the speech on a powerful note which gives the audience a feeling the speech is finished, and is finished appropriately and comfortably. Without the sense of closure, the audience feels the speech ended abruptly, as if it was cut off, without a sense of finality. Given how important the ending of the speech is, a good speaker will take time to plan the last few lines to make sure they provide closure. Most of us have had the uncomfortable experience of reaching the end of a speech and realizing we do not have a good, final line. Some basic preparation can avoid such an awkward situation.

There are a range of options for a speaker in ending the speech:

- **Use any of the attention getting devices**: end with a quotation, a reference to the audience or occasion, or any other technique that ends the speech in a comfortable manner.
- **Use a reference to introduction**. The speaker ends the speech by referring to how it started. For example, if a speech on child abuse starts with a story of an abused child, the conclusion might bring us up to date on where the child is now. If the speaker started with a response question, they may reference back to how the audience responded and make some sort of observation about how, after hearing the speech, their response may change. The positive effect of referencing the introduction is that it ties the speech up in a nice, neat package.
- **End with a challenge.** Especially for persuasion, end the speech by challenging the audience to engage in a specific action to fix a problem or situation. In effect, the speaker attempts to motivate the audience to set a goal and work to achieve it. For example, at a commencement address, it is common to hear the speaker challenge the students to take risks and to strive hard to achieve lofty goals.
- **Call for action:** Especially for persuasion, end the speech by reinforcing the steps the audience can take to implement the solution. For example, if the speaker is working to persuade the audience to exercise more, they may end with something like, “So when you leave here today, find that exercise, that physical activity, that thing you do that makes you feel good, and just do it.”

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11.6: Public Speaking Virtually

Learning Objectives

- Explore virtual public speaking as an emerging medium
- Define synchronous and asynchronous communication
- Strategize best practices for online speaking

Traditionally, public speaking has been understood as a face-to-face exchange between a designated speaker and an audience. Like we discussed in Chapter 1, this understanding of public speaking has a 2500-year history. In fact, when you imagine a public speaker, you likely picture a person standing on a stage with a podium and speaking in front of a live audience.

However, new media and digital technologies have begun expanding both our access to public speakers and our platforms to speak and reach new audiences. YouTube—a global video sharing service—has more than 1.8 billion monthly users (Gilbert, 2018), and these are just people who log-in! If you're like us, you've likely watched hours of content published on YouTube, from instructional videos to political commentary. You may even access videos on Instagram Live or TikTok. With access to these platforms, speakers are now able to broadcast their insights and advocacies to a global audience.

Businesses, too, have begun using online public speaking. Webinars, video conferences, and digital speakers have permeated professional industries, and it's becoming increasingly important to consider best practices for creating and being in the audience for online public speeches. Like any approach toward public speaking, online public speaking offers a variety of opportunities and constraints. Below, we outline what digital public speaking is and how to prepare to speak online.

Online Public Speaking

Online public speaking – also known as digital oratory—is a "thesis-driven, vocal, embodied public address that is housed within (online) new media platforms" (Lind, 2012, p. 164). Like all public speeches, an online speech should be well-prepared, organized, well-reasoned, and well-rehearsed. As you think through an online speech, purpose, synchronicity, and the audience all play key roles.



Figure 11.7.1 Under Secretary of the Air Force Gina Ortiz Jones speaks at the virtual Congressional Equality Caucus Don't Ask Don't Tell Commemoration Event, held Sept. 20, 2021. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Erin Smith)

Purpose

Online speaking opportunities are not created equally, and each speech will have different goals—informing, persuading, or entertaining. Remember that digital oratory requires a thesis statement, and the purpose will dictate how you craft the information that you're going to present. With ready access to video technology that can be transmitted through our phones, it can be tempting to log-in and let our followers into our lives through a stream-of-consciousness vlog, but that's not the type of digital oratory that constitutes prepared public speaking. Instead, it's important to begin by asking: what's my purpose? What's my thesis? Then, organize your speech around the answer.

For example, you might be participating—or leading—a "**webinar,"** which is a meeting or presentation over the Internet using a tool such as Blackboard Collaborate, Citrix, GoToMeeting, Adobe Connect, or one of many other web conferencing tools. You could also record an instructional video that details how to navigate a new piece of technology. Alternatively, you may be asked to send a digital response that reviews a policy change or advocacy. Each speech will have a different purpose and, in turn, different expectations on what you should include. Once you've identified the goal, use earlier chapters to begin crafting content.

Synchronicity

Like we mentioned, traditional public speaking occurs in face-to-face contexts. If you're presenting a speech live, you're speaking **synchronously**, meaning your audience is experiencing it in real-time. Some online public speeches occur synchronously. If you're speaking to a non-profit organization about a local food pantry project through Skype and the members of the organization are tuning in live to watch and hear your presentation, the speech is synchronous.

In synchronous online speaking, many of the same face-to-face speaking principles apply. Like we've discussed, live presentations are ephemeral, meaning they happen once. In synchronous online speaking – unless it's being recorded – you have one chance to create a clear message, so it's imperative that your content and information are crafted for clear understanding.

Alternatively, you may speak **asynchronously**, meaning that the speech may be recorded and watched at a different time. YouTube, for example, houses many asynchronous videos, allowing audiences to tune in and watch when their schedule allows it. With an asynchronous video, speakers may have additional time to record, watch, and re-do if necessary. Similarly, audiences also have the ability to re-watch your presentation or pause the speech, if needed. Each option provides different opportunities and constraints.

In synchronous speaking, you may be more comfortable in adopting and applying face-to-face public speaking strategies, including integrating live audience feedback. It's common in synchronous online speaking for audiences to post questions or provide live feedback, allowing you to adjust your content and fill in gaps. If there is a technological mishap, however, you aren't able to correct it later. The mishap also happens in real time, and those barriers can influence your ethos as a speaker.

In asynchronous speaking, you are able to control the content more easily because you can re-record, so if there's a technological error, you can fix it! However, you lose the ability for audiences to provide you with live feedback, so you may be unaware if there's a key question or issue that audiences need answered. We'll discuss audiences in more detail below.

The Audience

New media has expanded the audience pool for public speaking. In traditional public speaking, the audience is often limited to those individuals who show up for the event—the audience is explicit. In online speaking, you may have a discrete or dispersed audience. These different audience types, along with synchronicity, alter how audience engagement can occur.

Consider our earlier example about presenting to a non-profit organization through Skype. In this example, it's likely that you're aware of who the audience is, so you're able to link your content to the discrete (or defined) audience.

However, your audience may be dispersed and more difficult to determine. If you become passionate about a local policy, for example, and decide to post a speech on YouTube, the audience is dispersed because it's unclear who will click the link. With a

dispersed audience, it can be difficult to make specific references or calls to action because geographic locations may alter what individuals are able to do.

With a dispersed audience, there's also an increased risk that audience members won't view your digital speech. The increased use of digital communication has led to information overload – we've all experienced it. If you're like us, you might scan through Instagram stories, clicking past images or videos that don't catch your attention. If you're posting a digital speech with a less-defined audience, the first few lines – the attention getter – become crucial to hook them into watching. Spend a little extra time crafting and rehearsing your attention getter.

Being in the Audience: you'll likely audience many online public speeches – synchronous and asynchronous. Remember to take your position as an audience member seriously and avoid negative comments or trolling behavior. Even if you don't know the speaker, how you contribute to the dialogue online (or how you communicate) still functions constitutively, so make sure the world-making that you're participating in is ethical.

Rehearsing to Speak Online

Rehearsing to speak online can feel a bit odd, especially when video software enters the mix. You'll be more effective in rehearsal if you're aware of the speaking context, including the categories mentioned in the previous section: purpose, synchronicity, and audience. Knowing the context will and should inform how you rehearse for a digital speech because you should always rehearse under the conditions that you'll speak.

> **Tip:** Do your best to rehearse under the conditions that you'll speak.

Generally, we recommend integrating aesthetic strategies as you would for other speeches— including the purposeful development of verbal, nonverbal delivery, and presentation aids. There are a few additional variables for delivering a speech digitally that we'll track below.

Verbal Delivery

Verbal delivery is key in a digital speech – particularly webinars or web conferencing where your vocals overlay a slideshow and your body isn't visible to an audience. Verbal enunciation, punctuation, rate, and pauses become key to maintaining your audiences' attention. "Energy" becomes a key word – an energetic voice has variety and interest to it.

Audio-recording yourself during rehearsal on your smartphone or other device is a good first step, followed by thinking critically and honestly about whether your voice is listless, flat, or lacks energy. Since we tend to have a lower energy level when we sit, some experts suggest that web conference speakers stand to approximate the real speaking experience. As we have mentioned repeatedly through this book, preparing means practicing your speech orally and physically, many times.

Sound and projection are two variables that can affect your verbal delivery in digital contexts. It's important to rehearse with any technology – including a microphone – that will be present and in the physical context that you'll record the formal speech. If you have a microphone, you will need to alter your projection level. If you don't have a microphone, be aware of how the recording device will pick up sound – including your voice and other noise around you. Extra noise can influence your credibility and the likelihood that an audience will continue listening.

For example, one of your authors recently had a local mayoral race, and the candidates used Instagram Live as a platform to deliver their insights. One candidate sat outside and, after they gave an initial welcome, began answering questions that were posted live. Sadly, however, being outside without a microphone made it difficult to hear, and there was lots of noisy feedback from the wind.

Like we mentioned above, effective rehearsal occurs under the conditions that you'll speak. There are additional factors in digital contexts that can influence your vocal delivery, so rehearse with those factors in mind.

Nonverbal Delivery

When rehearsing your nonverbal delivery, ask, "what's visible in the video?"

As you rehearse, be conscious of where the recording device will be. Will there be just one? Will there be multiple videos? How far away? In some instances, audiences may have the ability to view your speech from multiple vantage points. Being aware of where those cameras are—one or multiple – is key to rehearsing your eye contact and facial expressions.

Eye contact is still a key part of a digital speech. While you can avoid staring directly into the camera for an extended period of time, audiences still want some form of engagement, and eye contact allows you to make that connection. If you are recording the speech with or without a live audience, view the camera as your "audience substitute."

Your facial expressions are also visible in a digital speech. If the camera is close up, this is even more true. Rehearse under these conditions, and record your facial expressions to see how they are translating to others. Also, ask: what is visible in the video? What adjustments do you want to make? Can you move further back? Can you adjust the camera? You will only have answers to these questions through a videoed rehearsal.

Finally, your background is also part of your video's nonverbal aesthetics. Make sure that you consider how the background might translate to your audience. Is it messy? Distracting? Is it a white background? If so, you should avoid wearing white and disappearing into the walls.

Remember that your goal is to create an aesthetic experience that honors the purpose of your speech, so being accountable to all nonverbal factors will increase your ethos.

Additional Preparation Tips:

1. Make sure you will not be interrupted during your speech.
2. Have notes and anything else you need right at hand. While you can use a computer to display them, be conscious of your audience's ability to see you reading.
3. If you can be seen, be seen—use the technology to your advantage so that you are not an entirely disembodied voice talking over slides.

Figure 11.7.2 Presentation for Multiple Audiences

Visual/Presentation Aids

In some cases, an online speech will include presentation aids. It's important to determine a) if the presentation aid is necessary and b) if you're able to provide that presentation aid in a different form.

First, are you certain you need a presentation aid? It can be tempting to use a presentation aid for a digital speech to avoid being visible to the audience. After all, it's common for digital presentation software to display either a visual aid or your body. If you're only using a visual aid to avoid being displayed, that's likely a poor reason, particularly because your embodied presentation is more interesting to the audience.

If you deem that a presentation aid is absolutely necessary (or required), make sure you're following the guidelines from Chapter 12. Also, ask: do I need to provide it live or in the recording? If you're presenting to a discrete audience and want to provide a graph or some data, send the information in a report ahead of time. This will allow your audience to feel acquainted with the information and can save you from having an additional technological component.

Speaking for an Online Class

- Film your whole body—not just your head and shoulders
- Do tech walk-throughs and make sure your camera is working well and picking up your voice.
- Wear appropriate clothing. Not being in class may tempt you to wear something too informal. Make sure, also, that it looks good on camera in terms of color and lighting in your setting.
- Be conscious of lighting.
- Carefully follow your instructor's requirements for audience and audience visibility.

Conclusion

Virtual public speaking is evolving. These tips and tactics should help not just avoid the major problems but also cross the finish line into an effective presentation.

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12: PREPARING TO SPEAK AND MANAGING APPREHENSION

12.1: Incorporating Evidence/Sources
12.2: Visual Aids
12.3: Delivery
12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA)
12.5: Cognitive Restructuring and Building Confidence

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12.1: Incorporating Evidence/Sources

Learning Objectives

- explain how using support materials impacts speaker credibility.
- differentiate between internal and external evidence.
- distinguish the three types of testimony.
- distinguish the three types of examples.
- differentiate between descriptive and inferential statistics.
- cite a source appropriately.
- judge the validity of a source.

Once we have a good idea of what we want to say in the speech, we need to find and include **support materials**. Support materials refer to *any type of evidence, explanation, or illustration we use in the speech to enhance the likelihood the audience will accept and believe what we say*.

Credibility

We use support materials because we need to enhance the **credibility,** *the believability,* of our message with the audience. Our audiences will only believe our messages if they can have faith that what we are saying is reflective of the truth or the best ideas. Audiences should believe in us as speakers and in our message. The use of support materials builds our credibility and the credibility of our message.

In today's political climate, the ability to identify quality evidence is extremely important. With claims of "fake news" being used to dismiss any information not meeting one's pre-existing beliefs, our ethical obligation to identify the very best sources of information is greater than ever. Compounding this challenge is the plethora of web sites established to advocate certain viewpoints, to cherry-pick news stories for the most sensational tidbits, or to outright fabricate news stories. More than ever we must be critical consumers of information, carefully assessing what we are reading and hearing to separate truth from fiction, and reality from sensationalism. As speakers, we must use that same critical process to insure we are presenting evidence to our audience that can withstand scrutiny.

When using evidence, especially from outside our own experiences, we rely on **credibility transfer.** We select good, quality sources we anticipate the audience will find credible, with the hope that by using that source, *the credibility attributed to the source will transfer to us as speakers*. That is why good, clear source citations are so important. By citing the source, we are giving information to the audience to allow them to establish the credibility of the source and to enhance our credibility as the speaker.

There are two broad categories of evidence: internal and external. **Internal evidence** refers to *our own personal experiences, knowledge and opinions*. The evidence can be strong if the audience sees us as having expertise in the area. As the audience's perception of the speaker's credibility increases, the speaker can rely more on internal evidence and less on external. However, even highly credible speakers will still use external evidence as well to enhance their expertise.

External evidence is *the experiences, information and opinion from someone other than the speaker*. For external evidence to carry weight with the audience, they must view these external sources as credible.

Types of External Evidence

There are three types of evidence: testimony, examples, and statistics. Each one has its strengths and weaknesses.

Testimony

Testimony refers to *quotations by others about the topic*. When quoting someone, we can either quote verbatim, or we can paraphrase. When quoting **verbatim**, the speaker is *quoting the person exactly as the person said it*. This works well if the

quotation is worded in a very powerful, memorable, impactful manner. **Paraphrasing** is *restating what the source said in the speaker's own words, but keeping the intent of what was said*. Paraphrasing is especially valuable when dealing with longer quotations, or with quotations in which the wording is confusing or not as engaging as the speaker wants. Regardless of why the information is paraphrased, the speaker has an ethical obligation to make sure the quotation is translated in a manner keeping the intent of the original.

There are three types of testimony: lay, prestige, and expert.

- **Lay testimony** refers to statements by the "person on the street." These can be effective as audience members may relate more to "someone like me." Infomercials use lay testimony heavily to try to prove the advertised product will work for "someone just like you." It is important to remember a lay person is not an expert, so the proof value may not be as high as the speaker assumes.
- **Prestige testimony** is from someone who is well known, but is not considered an expert in their field. Examples would include statements by celebrities like John Stewart, Stephen Colbert, or from the world of movies, television, or literature. They are usually used because of their interesting, engaging nature, although their ability to seriously prove a point is not strong. These are virtually always quoted verbatim.
- **Expert testimony** is from someone who is an expert in the topic. These quotations carry the most weight of the three types of testimony ifthe audience sees this person as being highly credible. Expert testimonies are usually found in newspapers, magazines, journals, or off internet research sites. Their weakness is often the wording can be dry and "academic" in tone, so frequently the speaker will need to paraphrase the quotation to have it carry more "punch" with the audience.

Examples

Examples are *narratives relating to the topic*. They can range from instances to examples to stories, depending on length.

An **instance** is *a quick reference, usually in a word or two, about a specific occurrence*. For example, "D-Day" would remind the audience of a larger specific event, or "Sandy Hook" would remind the audience of the tragic school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary. Be sure the audience understands the reference. For example, for many people today, making a reference to "Columbine" may not be as effective as it was several years ago.

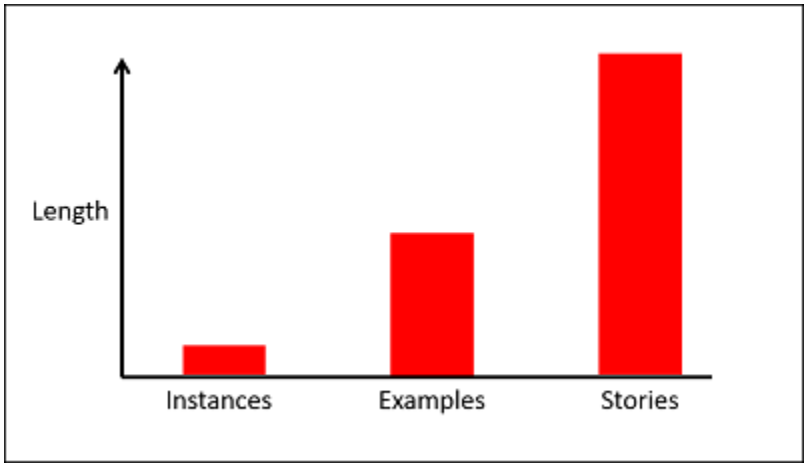


Figure 12.1.1: Bar Graph Example

On the other end of the continuum are **stories**. Stories are *fully developed narratives with a beginning, middle, and end*. They can be used for longer speeches, but are usually too involved for shorter speeches. The advantage of stories, if given well, they can be very involving and interesting. If they are not told well, they can end up being boring. The keys to using stories effectively are that the speaker tells the story well, and the story has a point that adds significantly to the purpose of the speech.

In the middle is the more common **example**. When using an example, *the speaker gives the pertinent details*, but does not develop it as a full-blown story. For example, to illustrate a speech on drinking and driving, a speaker might give some examples of individuals who were injured and the long-lasting effects. Saying only the name of the victim would not work, nor would the speaker want to tell the whole story of each person. The speaker gives the important details of each example, enough so the

audience understands the point of the example.

Generally, examples are a very effective form of proof with an audience, although by themselves they do not often prove the breadth of the problem; after all, one or two examples do not prove there is a widespread problem. However, due to the human interest we experience with examples, they have the ability, when well delivered, to involve the audience more on a human, emotional level than on a rational, cognitive level.

Statistics

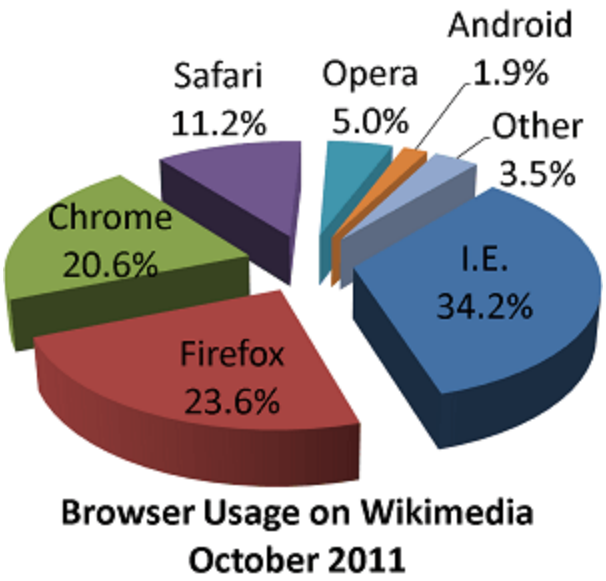
Statistics refer to the *numerical representation of data*. Statistics can be the most powerful form of evidence to prove the extent of a problem; however, they can also be horrendously misused. In western culture, we tend to believe once a problem has been quantified and expressed in statistics, the statistics are inherently truthful. Statistics can be manipulated, misused, and misrepresented just as any other evidence can be misused. Speakers must be especially cautious when selecting statistics to be sure the numbers come from a quality source and are accurate reflections of reality.

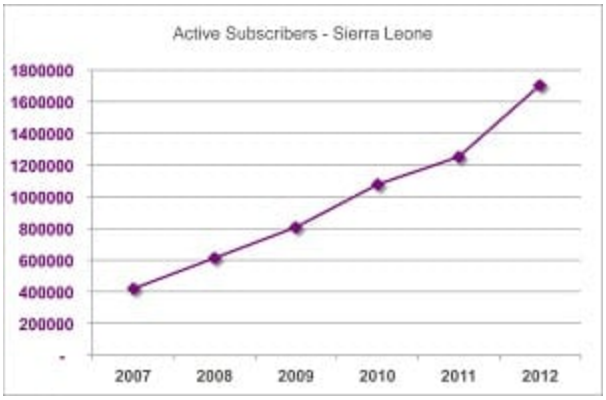
Statistics are used in two ways: descriptively and inferentially. **Descriptive statistics** *describe what was true at a given moment in time*. They describe data from the past. The past can be distant, such as in years, or recent, such as hours or days. The statistics reflect what was found when the statistics were gathered. For example, if a poll is taken on a Monday to determine which of two candidates is ahead in a political race, the statistics reflect what was found on the day. If on Wednesday, the media reports one candidate was arrested for drug dealing 10 years earlier, the results of Monday's poll become worthless as they reflected the results prior to the revelation of the drug dealing. When asked what the enrollment of Ridgewater College is, we usually refer to what is called "10th day enrollment." The enrollment of Ridgewater on the 10th day of the semester is used as the official attendance figure, but since students tend to drop out throughout the semester even on the 11th day the number may be wrong. Descriptive statistics report what was found on the day at the time. Descriptive statistics are the type we encounter most of the time.

Inferential statistics are used *to predict what may happen in the future*. Simply taking descriptive statistics and assuming what they report will be true in the future is a faulty assumption. Rather, inferential statistics are specifically developed to predict behavior. For example, if a study establishes through valid research that as the poverty rate increases crime increases, we could infer if a community experiences a rise in the poverty rate, they are likely to experience a rise in the crime rate. The statistics link behaviors together. Physicians use statistics inferentially daily. As medications are tested, statistical relationships between variables, such as weight, and therapeutic effect are determined. Doctors then use the statistics to determine the appropriate dosage for a given patient, predicting with a high degree of confidence the medical outcome.

Whether used descriptively or inferentially, statistics have some distinct issues:

- **The Source**: Hundreds of organizations in the U.S. have the goal of persuading the American people and American government to a specific position. Since their goal is inherently biased to one position, statistics released by the organizations are inherently biased. Even if the statistics they release were gathered and processed properly, they will be selective in which statistics they release, publishing only ones supporting their position.
- **Gathering/Processing**: Gathering and processing statistics have distinct guidelines. If statistics are not gathered using the guidelines, the quality of the statistics is highly questionable. Get statistics from reliable sources to produce quality statistical data.
- **Interpretation**: It is important speakers use statistics honestly, not inferring conclusions from them the statistics may not support. For example, if a speaker has statistics that 60% of Americans favor hand gun control, they should not use those to claim that the majority of Americans favor gun control; the statistics are specific to *hand gun* control, not gun control in general.
- **Presentation**: Statistics can be very confusing. The use of graphs helps immensely in clarifying numbers. It is up to the speaker to make sure the audience understands what the statistics are saying.





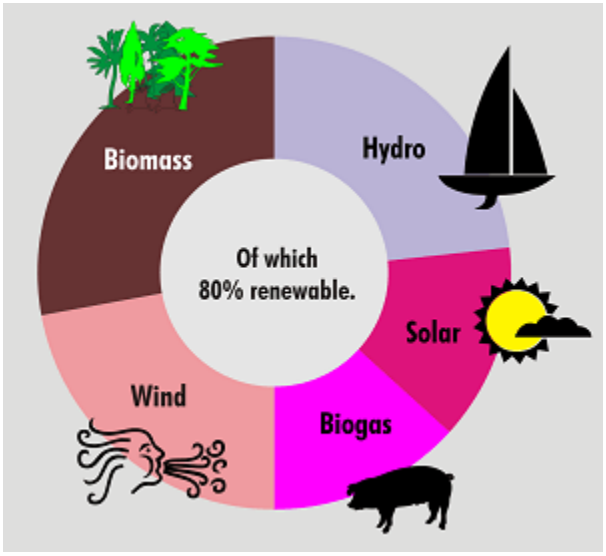


Figure 12.1.2**, Figure** 12.1.3**, Figure** 12.1.4**: Graph Examples**

Evaluating Sources

Regardless of the type of evidence used, a core ethical speaker responsibility is presenting the audience with quality, trustworthy information. One way to do this is apply the CRAAP Test to sources. Adapted from “Evaluating Information—Applying the CRAAP Test, “ from the Meriam Library of California Sate University, Chico, there are five criteria to apply to when evaluating sources:

Currency: The timeliness of the information.

- When was the information published or posted?
- Has the information been revised or updated?
- Does the topic require current information, or will older sources work as well?
- Are the links functional?

Relevance: The importance of the information for the speech.

- Does the information relate to the specific purpose of the speech?
- Who is the intended audience for the information?
- Is the information at an appropriate level (i.e. not too elementary or advanced for the needs)?
- Is this the best of several sources reviewed?
- Will providing this information from this source increase the likelihood that the audience will accept the speech content as valid and credible?

Authority: The source of the information.

- Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor?
- What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations?
- Is the author qualified to write on the topic?
- Is there contact information, such as a publisher or email address?
- Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? Examples: .com .edu .gov .org .net
- Will this source be viewed as credible by the audience?

Accuracy: The reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content.

- Where does the information come from?
- Is the information supported by evidence?
- Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
- Can the information be verified in another source or from personal knowledge?
- Does the language or tone seem unbiased and free of emotion?
- Are there spelling, grammar or typographical errors?
- Can the accuracy of this source be easily defended?

Purpose: The reason the information exists.

- What is the purpose of the information? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain or persuade?
- Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?
- Is the information fact, opinion or propaganda?
- Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional or personal biases?

Source Citations

Whenever a speaker uses any external sources, a source citation must be given. One major reason is to avoid plagiarism, presenting others' ideas and words as one's own. Citing sources also facilitates the credibility transfer process discussed earlier. If the speaker does not cite the sources, the audience will not know the sources were used; hence, the credibility transfer process will not occur.

In a speech, sources are cited differently than in writing. Obviously, we cannot use footnotes or give a list of works cited at the end of our speech. Instead, the speaker should verbally cite the sources where they are used.Speakers can be creative and vary how the source is cited and when it is cited. They should be cited smoothly, fitting into the overall flow of the speech. When citing the source, give enough information an audience member could reasonably locate the source and the audience can make a determination of credibility.

Example 12.1.1

Here are some examples of typical source citations:

- "According to the May 3, 2009, *Star Tribune* article by Dr. Amy Fisher..."
- "Dr. Dana Brown, Director of the Breast Cancer Research Fund, said in last week's *Time* magazine, that..."
- "John Gray, in his 1992 book, *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus,* explained..."
- "Just last month in Esquire magazine, Stephen Colbert said..."

They are more casual and succinct than citations in a research paper would be. Some instructors require students to hand in a typed bibliography and will usually want it in either MLA or APA format. Students should pay attention to their instructor's expectations.

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12.2: Visual Aids

Learning Objectives

- explain the rationale for using visual aids.
- describe the types of visual aids.
- identify the characteristics of good slides.
- use slides appropriately.

Quite commonly, we employ **visual aids** (or sometimes referred to as **presentation aids**) to assist us in presenting the message in a clear, easily followed manner. Although they are usually called visual aids, they are *any sensory element added to the speech to enhance the speaker's message*. Typically, speakers use visual elements, such as graphs and charts, but visual aids can also include items for the audience to hear, touch, taste, or smell.

It is important to understand that visual aids are used to aid the speaker, not to replace the speaker. At all times, the focus of the event should be on the speaker and the verbal message, not on the sensory aids. The speaker needs to smoothly integrate the visual aids into the presentation so as not to distract from the core message of the speech. A general rule of thumb is if the speech cannot be presented without the visual aids, the visual aids are being used too heavily. Visual aids can be forgotten, may not work, or equipment may break down. Struggling to deal with non-functioning visual aids can severely damage the credibility of the speaker, so a good speaker is ready to adapt and move forward, adapting to the challenge of not having the aids.

Purposes of Visual Aids

We use visual aids for four reasons:

- **To Clarify:** A picture really is worth a thousand words. In many cases, a visual aid can communicate a message more clearly than words. Imagine trying to explain the beauty of a Caribbean island or the complexity of an automobile engine without the use of a visual element. Words alone will not have the same impact as when combined with an image.
- **To Enhance Memory Value:** When the audience receives the message in multiple ways, through the speaker's spoken message and through the visual aids, the memory value of the message increases. For some audience members, hearing the message will suffice, but for others, a visual element is more memorable. Using a visual aid allows the audience to tap into the message in a way that works best for them.
- **To Fulfill Audience Expectations:** With the advent of slides, such as PowerPoint, audiences have become accustomed to seeing these types of visuals accompanying a presentation. At times the speaker needs to use a visual aid because the audience expects it. For example, at conferences it is common that audience members need a printout of slides to validate attendance, so to not use a visual aid becomes a barrier to audience engagement.
- **To Add Variety:** Although this should not be used as a primary purpose, if the speaker is using an aid to clarify or to enhance memory value, the aids also provide some nice variety for the audience. Avoid using aids just for variety, as they can too easily become more important than the message.

Types of Visual Aids

Visual aids can take on many forms with the only limit being the speaker’s imagination. Always remembering they are aids, not replacements, there are a myriad of choices available. From PowerPoint slides to poster board to objects, the speaker has many options for creating powerful visual elements.

Using Slides Effectively

Since PowerPoint debuted in 1990, slide-based tools like Apple Keynote, Google Slides, and Prezi have become the standard for visual aids. While posters and overheads still exist, many audiences now expect slides in presentations, particularly on complicated topics—so it’s important to use it well.

We've all seen bad slides: walls of text, tiny fonts, the presenter reading word-for-word, or mismatched visuals. The goal is to make slides that support your message, not compete with it. Every word, image, or animation should have a clear purpose.

Tips for Better Slides:

- **Keep it consistent:** Use the same fonts, colors, and layout throughout.
- **Choose readable text:** At least 18-point font—big enough to see, not big enough to shout. Readable color contrast to the background color.
- **Limit content:** Use keywords and short phrases; you explain the rest.
- **Reveal gradually:** Use blank slides between filled slides and only keep slides up when relating to spoken content.
- **Use meaningful images:** Only include visuals you'll actively discuss—no random decoration.
- **Leave breathing room:** Avoid edge-to-edge clutter; you may need to stand near the screen.
- **Balance the slide:** Not too empty, not too packed.
- **Plan blank slides:** Black or empty slides can give attention back to you.
- **Rethink the title slide:** Jump right into your content if it's more engaging.
- **Use only what's needed:** Enough to help understanding, but not so much it's distracting.
- **Prepare for tech fails:** Be ready to present without slides, and consider having a printed backup.

Good slides don't replace the speaker—it works with you to make your message clearer and more memorable.

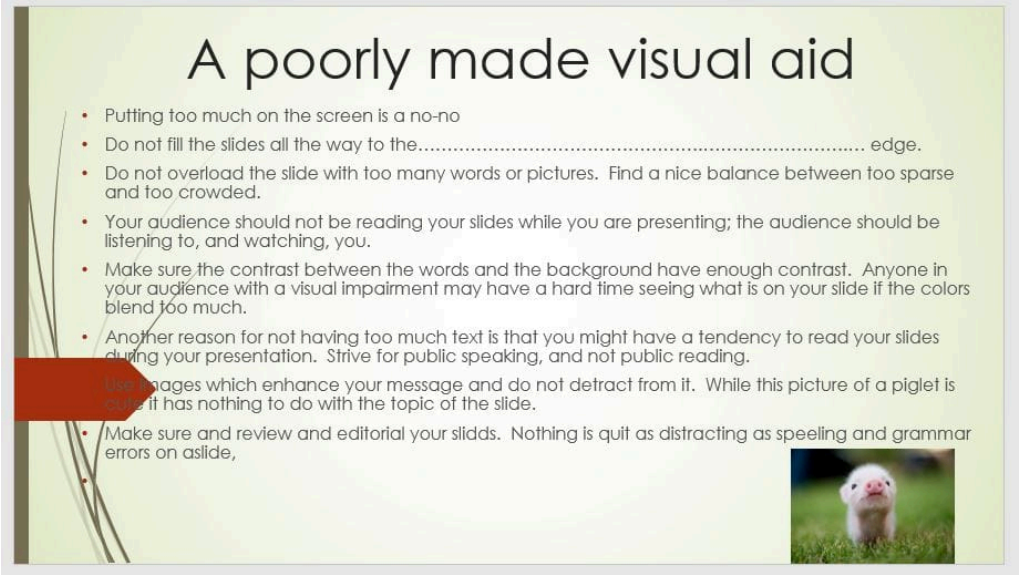


Figure 12.2.1: Slide Example 1



Figure 12.2.2: Slide Example 2

Speaking with Slides

PowerPoint, Keynote, and similar tools can make your message clearer—or painfully dull—depending on how you use them. Slides are there to support you, not replace you.

Note

Don't:

- **Read your slides** — your audience can read for themselves. Summarize and expand on the points instead.
- **Talk to the screen** — glance at it briefly, but keep your eyes and focus on your audience.
- **Block the view** — avoid standing in front of the projection or in harsh light.

Do:

- **Control focus** — stand near the screen to create a unified visual, or step away with a blank slide when you want attention solely on you.
- **Use transitions wisely** — reveal points or images as you discuss them, and use gestures to direct attention to specific elements.
- **Use a remote** — it lets you move freely and engage naturally. Practice with it beforehand so you know the controls (and how to recover from mistakes).

Be tech-ready:

- **Arrive early to set up and test everything**—slides, sound, internet, projector, remote.
- **Bring backups** (your own laptop, adapters, files on a USB or cloud).
- **Plan for failure**—know how to present without slides if needed.

Your credibility depends not just on what you say, but on how smoothly you integrate your visuals into the presentation.

Objects

Models, samples, or actual items can certainly be used as visual aids. For instance, if Noah is informing an audience about how airplanes fly, having a model of a plane's wing would be quite valuable for him to use in pointing out how lift works. Or if Stephanie is going to inform the audience on the importance of a Native American jingle dress, having one with her will help her demonstrate the distinctive sound. There are some cautions about using actual objects:

- Make sure the object is large enough for the audience to see, yet not so large as to make managing it difficult.
- To control focus, plan how to reveal it and remove it when needed.
- Speak to the audience, not the object.
- Make sure the object is manageable. For example, one of your authors had a student give a speech on how to care for a cat and brought an actual cat to the classroom. Cats are rather unpredictable in strange settings, and most of the class was spent corralling the cat versus listening to the speech. Even when giving the speech, the cat was so squirmy the speaker and audience could hardly focus on the message.
- Think about possible problems. The cat example above shows things often go in very unpredictable directions. If giving a speech on snakes, bringing a snake seems like a good idea, but remember some people have such a fear of them they may have real problems paying attention.

Other People

Incorporating human assistants can be an engaging, lively way to get a point across. For example, if giving a speech teaching the Heimlich Maneuver for choking, demonstrating it on another person would be quite useful and informative.

Electronic Equipment

In addition to slides, there are other types of electronic equipment speakers can use. Slide projectors, overhead projectors, audio players, or video players could all potentially be used. The two overriding concerns of any electronic equipment are 1) it will work properly when needed, and 2) the speaker knows how to use the equipment smoothly and effectively, to be able to incorporate it seamlessly and with little distraction.

Using Visual Aids

In addition to the suggestions on using slides, when using visual aids of any type, three overriding guidelines are:

Even when the visual aid is revealed, use gestures and movement to control the audience's focus more precisely. For example, for a list of items on a chart, the speaker should gesture to draw focus to whichever item they want their audience to focus on.

Always remember, whatever the speaker looks at, the audience looks at. If the speaker keeps making nervous glances at the visual aid, the audience will follow, diverting their focus.

- **Control Audience Focus***:* When a visual aid is revealed, the audience will focus on the visual aid, working to figure out what it is, what it says, and what it means. The speaker should have the aids visible only when they want the audience to pay attention to them. Determine the right time to unveil the visual aid, and the right time to put the visual aid away.
- **Practice**: Being comfortable in the use of visual aids communicates preparation and confidence. Practice with them to get a strong feeling for when and how to manipulate them. If the speaker begins to appear less confident and less sure of what to do with the aids, the audience becomes uncomfortable, anticipating failure versus anticipating success.
- **Limit Them**: The speaker must carefully consider what is important and what is not. Too many aids shift the focus from the speaker to the aids, the movement of the aids, and the general confusion caused by the amount of movement in the front of the room. Fewer well-developed aids have more impact than using many.



Figure 12.2.3**: Using a visual**

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12.3: Delivery

Learning Objectives

- describe the four methods of speech delivery.
- use the extemporaneous or conversational style of speaking.
- make effective verbal communication choices.
- make appropriate nonverbal communication choices.

No matter how well a speech is constructed, how qualified the sources of evidence, and how good the visual aids, a speech is still a performance. If a speech is not delivered well, the speech is weaker. A well-delivered speech with weaker content will be seen as better than a speech that is strong in content but is poorly delivered. For example, a very intelligent teacher may have excellent information, but if they cannot communicate in a clear, pleasant manner, students will struggle to be engaged. How we present information is as important as the quality of the content, and we need to be responsible to do the very best job we can with both.

In our highly mediated culture, we are well accustomed to information being packaged for us in enjoyable ways. We expect good television shows, movies, music, and web sites. If we do not like the way they are packaged, we turn the channel, flip the switch, or surf away. Since we are speaking to audiences that expect the speaker to make the speech interesting, we have to take on that responsibility to make good choices for an effective presentation. In order to understand what kinds of choices can be made, we need to consider the various methods of giving speeches, the characteristics of good verbal and nonverbal delivery, and the impact our speech anxiety can have on effective speaking.

Delivery Methods

Speakers use four main delivery methods: impromptu, manuscript, memorized, and extemporaneous. Each approach has its own advantages and challenges, and learning them will help you choose the best style for different speaking situations.

Impromptu

Impromptu speaking is *speaking with little or no preparation when the speaker was unaware that he/she would be speaking*. It is only impromptu speaking if the speaker truly did not know they would be asked to speak. Simply failing to prepare for a known speech is not impromptu; that is irresponsibility. Impromptu speaking is the most common form of speaking. Whether in a classroom or a business meeting, we are often called upon to state our ideas in a thoughtful organized way. Perhaps we are not standing in front of a room when we do it, but even if sitting, our credibility and believability are still being judged. Realistically, anytime a person is called upon to say something intelligent, they are being placed in an impromptu speaking situation.

There are three keys to speaking impromptu: organization, fluidity, and delivery. First, the speaker needs to have the information well organized so the listeners can follow the development of ideas. Second, the speaker needs to be fluid, carefully monitoring the use of verbal pauses, hesitancies, and restatements. Third, the speaker needs to have a strong, outwardly focused delivery with especially good eye contact. Since the audience realizes this is impromptu, meeting the three standards demonstrates a powerful degree of confidence and ability.

Extemporaneous

Extemporaneous speaking is *speaking from limited notes, but well prepared*. Extemporaneous delivery is somewhat like having a conversation with the audience. This is the speaking style that most speakers do use and should use. The method focuses the speaker properly, on the flow of ideas instead of the flow of words. Extemporaneous speaking combines two very important traits of good speaking: the speaker is well practiced and prepared, and the speaker retains flexibility in wording to adapt to the present audience.

To speak effectively extemporaneously:

1. **Carefully prepare an outline of the speech**, getting the flow of ideas developed to a comfortable point.
2. **Practice the speech from the outline.** There are three major benefits to this step. First, the speaker is getting comfortable with communicating the information. They start to get a sense of what the actual situation will be like. Second, what looks good on paper may not necessarily sound good when delivered. The speaker may realize a need to reorder or redo sections of the speech to have a comfortable "flow" to the presentation. Third, the speaker gets a realistic sense of the length of the speech. The only way to really know how long a speech will last is to stand up and give it, so the process is vital. The speaker may find the speech runs long, so they have to edit something out, or if the speech runs short, they may be looking to add ideas and material.
3. **Develop notecards.** It is important to balance having enough notes to adequately do the job with keeping them minimal so as to reduce the amount of time spent focusing on them. Always remember, the more notes a speaker has, the more they look at their notes and not the audience. Try to work with minimal notes. Use words and phrases on the card to allow for glancing at the notes as a reminder of what to say next.
4. **Practice with and refine the notecards**. Practice the speech from the notecards, making any necessary alterations. Once the final cards are developed, focus the remainder of the practice on developing a strong delivery. Be sure to practice being able to glance at the notecards, don't read from them.
5. **When practicing, it is important to not start over every time a mistake occurs.** First, by starting over repeatedly, the opening of the speech gets practiced a lot, but the same attention does not get paid to the remainder of the speech. This can lead to a noticeable decline in comfort and confidence when the speech is delivered. Second, by working through the entire speech, the speaker can practice adjusting to mistakes so as to be more prepared for when those slips occur in the actual presentation.

Manuscript

Manuscript speaking is *speaking from a verbatim (word by word) script*. The speech is written out and then is literally read to the audience. For most speakers in most situations, manuscript speaking is not the appropriate delivery method:

- When writing a speech out, it is too easy to slip from an oral style of language to a written style; thus, the speech sounds very unnatural and awkward.
- Manuscript speaking focuses the speaker on the flow of words, not the flow of ideas.
- Manuscript speaking can be very boring and monotone, with little eye contact.
- The speaker is so locked onto the manuscript, he/she has little freedom for movement or variety in general.
- Manuscript speaking virtually removes any ability to adapt the speech to the moment or at the last minute.



Figure 12.3.2: Figure 2

However, in a few situations, manuscript speaking may be appropriate. If the exact wording must be so precise, manuscript

is appropriate. When the President speaks, he speaks from a manuscript as a simple misstatement can have dramatic consequences. The CEO of a company speaking to stockholders will speak from a manuscript to present the issues carefully. A commencement speaker will typically speak from a manuscript. However, for the vast majority of speaking situations and speakers, manuscript speaking is rarely justified.

Memorized

Memorized speaking is *committing a manuscript to memory* which is a very weak and dangerous method of delivering a speech. It has all the hazards of manuscript speaking with the added problems of forgetting and poor delivery. Memorized speaking usually leads to the highest levels of anxiety. Overall, unless there is some sort of specific, extenuating circumstance, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which memorized delivery is appropriate.

Verbal Delivery

Remember verbal and vocal are not the same thing. The verbal component of the speech refers to language choices. Vocal factors are part of nonverbal communication, addressed next. Using language effectively in a speech is quite important. Specific considerations when wording a speech include:

- **Comfortable Language:** Use language comfortable for the speaker and appropriate for the audience. Do not try to show off and certainly do not obfuscate. If using jargon, be sure to define the terms for the audience; do not assume they already know what various acronyms and technical terms mean.
- **Precise Language**: Use precise and concrete language. Vague and abstract language leads to misunderstanding.
- **Oral Language Style:** Use an oral style of language versus a written style. In developing speeches, it is important we do not write out a speech as we invariably slip into a written style versus the more spontaneous, casual, oral style. Avoid things like "as seen above" or "as written."
- **Descriptive Language:** Use colorful and vivid language. Good speakers paint verbal pictures for the audience. Use adjectives, examples, and description.
- **Avoid Offending:** Be cautious of offensive language. Some language is obviously offensive and easy to avoid. Some wording may not be as noticeable, however. For example, addressing a gender-mixed audience of salespeople as “salesmen” will most likely offend women. Think about the wording to avoid offending the audience.
- **Be Adaptable:** Remain flexible. The very reason for using an extemporaneous style is the flexibility and adaptability it allows. During practice, explore various ways to word the speech in order to have more choices from which to select during the presentation.

Nonverbal Delivery

Strong delivery and solid content must work hand in hand to give the audience a complete and effective package. From vocal factors to posture, delivery determines how engaged the audience becomes with the message. Consider all the lectures students experience. Some instructors pulled them into the material, getting their interest and holding it for a while. Unfortunately, some instructors, even those well versed in their field, had a delivery style that was not very stimulating for students.



Figure 12.3.3: Figure 3

In general, think of good delivery as expanded conversation. Speak conversationally to the audience, but in an organized way. The audience should feel the speaker is simply talking with them, not lecturing at them or presenting some sort of artificial persona. Audiences tend to engage more when they feel they are getting some insight into the person by listening to them speak of something important. Like good storytelling, good public speaking is energetic, enthusiastic, and dynamic. For the vast majority of speakers, their natural conversational style will serve as the foundation for their public speaking style, engaging their audiences in an effective manner.

In addition to expanded conversation, some specific nonverbal items to consider include:

- **Eye Contact:** Good speakers make eye contact with the audience which develops a connection between the audience and speaker, and demonstrates confidence. Work to make eye contact with all parts of the audience at some point, working left-to-right and front-to-back.
- **Facial Expression:** Good speakers use their natural expressiveness when in front of audiences to reflect the overall tone of the speech. The rule of thumb is the speaker should display what they want their audience to feel. Audiences are amazingly fast at sensing and responding to the emotional tone the speaker expresses.
- **Paralanguage:** Good speakers speak clearly, enunciate well, maintain a good volume and rate, and use vocal variety to emphasize points. The voice is the primary tool of a speaker, so using it well is important.
- **Verbal pauses:** Verbal pauses are sounds such as "uh," "um," and "ah," or words such as "like," "you know," "I mean," or "okay" used to fill pauses and interrupt the smooth flow of the words. A speaker's goal should be to minimize these, but in using an extemporaneous style of speaking, a few are to be expected. As verbal pauses rise, the audience's perception of credibility drops, but a few are not a significant problem.
- **Gestures:** Good speakers realize we normally use our hands when we talk, so using hand gestures is important. Comfortable gestures demonstrate confidence, open the speaker's posture, and help push the speaker's message out to the audience. They should, however, be used in the upper area of the body, and they should not be used in distracting ways. For example, avoid fidgeting with a note card, wringing hands, or playing with jewelry. Ideally, do what comes naturally, but avoid putting hands in the pockets, crossing arms, or clasping hands behind the back.
- **Body Movement:** Good speakers, unless forced to stay at a microphone, will move around to some degree. The movement should not appear to be a sign of anxiety. Instead, movement can add visual variety, aid in the transitions between points, and help the speaker work out some anxiety. The overall rule for effective delivery is "Once a delivery factor is noticed, it has hurt the speaker." A good speaker's delivery blends into the content as one, unified experience. If the audience is focusing on something such as gesturing, body movement, or eye contact, they are not focusing on the message of the speech.

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12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA)

Learning Objectives

- define communication apprehension
- consider the different types of anxieties speakers may experience

I get nervous when I don't get nervous. If I'm nervous, I know I'm going to have a good show. ~ Beyonce Knowles

Communication Apprehension

In this chapter, you will learn about dealing with one of the most common fears in our society: **the fear of public speaking**, which is referred to as **communication apprehension** (CA). If you are one of those folks – take comfort in the fact that you are not alone! Research indicates that 20% or more of the U.S. population has a high degree of communicative apprehension (McCroskey, 1976). CA is an isolating phenomenon; something that makes one feel alone in the struggle. This is true even as programs designed to help people overcome it – like this program and this chapter, for instance – are spreading nationwide. CA is a real phenomenon that represents a well- documented obstacle not only to academic, but also to professional success. CA can impact many diverse areas; from one's level of self-esteem (Adler, 1980) and how you are perceived by others (Dwyer & Cruz, 1998),to success in school, achieving high grade-point averages, and even landing job interview opportunities (Daly & Leth, 1976). People with higher levels of CA have demonstrated that they will avoid communicative interaction in personal and professional relationships, social situations, and importantly, classrooms. Such avoidance can result in miscommunication and misunderstanding, which only becomes compounded by further avoidance. CA left unaddressed can even lead to a negative disposition toward public interaction, which leads to a lesser degree of engagement, thus perpetuating the fear and further compounding the situation (Menzel & Carrell, 1994). The anxiety creates a vicious cycle and becomes a self- fulfilling prophecy. But it is a cycle that need not continue.

By reading this chapter, you will learn about CA; not necessarily how it develops, as that can be different in every individual, but rather about how people can deal with it effectively. You will learn how therapies employed by psychologists to help people deal with phobias can be translated into effective techniques to deal with CA. You will learn the differences between trait-anxiety, state-anxiety, and scrutiny fear, and how understanding the differences between them can help a person deal with their "personal brand" of CA. You will learn about how people develop habitual frames of reference that come to define the way they approach an anticipated experience – and how anyone can employ cognitive restructuring to help change habits that are counter- productive to delivering effective presentations. Habits can be very difficult to break, but the first step is becoming aware and wanting to succeed. Going into any activity with a positive attitude is one of the basic ways of maximizing performance. CA is not something that can easily be eliminated – turned "off" as if controlled by an internal toggle switch. But it doesn't have to remain an obstacle to success either.

Effective public speaking is not simply about learning what to say, but about developing the confidence to say it. For many, it all comes down to overcoming those nerves and convincing yourself that you can actually get up there and speak! Each individual deals with CA most effectively through increased self- awareness and a willingness to work on reducing its impact. To conquer the nervousness associated with public speaking, one must identify the factors that lead to this anxiety, and then take specific steps to overcome this apprehension.

CA is not the result of a single cause, and so the phenomenon itself comes in many forms. It is important for each person to recognize that their particular sort of CA (we'll call it a "personal brand") is a phenomenon that has developed uniquely through each of their lives and experiences. Just as each individual is different, so too is each case of CA. There are specific distinctions between "stage fright" – a term reserved for the common, virtually universal nervousness felt by everyone– and CA – which is essentially "stage fright" with a corresponding emotional trauma attached. Scholars are somewhat divided, however, on whether CA is something inherent in the individual, or if it is the result of experience. In most people, it is very likely a combination of factors.

Trait-Anxiety

Some researchers (McCroskey, et al. 1976) describe CA as **trait-anxiety**, meaning that it is a type of anxiety that is aligned with an individual's personality. People who would call themselves "shy" often seek to avoid interaction with others because they are uncertain of how they will be perceived. Avoiding such judgment is generally not difficult, and so becomes a pattern of behavior. These folks, according to researchers, are likely view any chance to express themselves publicly with skepticism and hesitation. This personal tendency is what is known as trait-anxiety.

State-Anxiety

Other researchers (Beatty, 1988) describe CA as **state-anxiety**, meaning that it is a type of anxiety that is derived from the external situation which individuals find themselves. While some may fear public speaking due to some personal trait or broader social anxiety, researchers have found that CA more often stems from the fear associated with scrutiny and negative evaluation. Some people may have had a negative experience in public at an early age – they forgot a line in a play, they lost a spelling bee, they did poorly when called on in front of their class – something that resulted in a bit of public embarrassment. Others may have never actually experienced that stress themselves, but may have watched friends struggle and thus empathized with them. These sorts of experiences can often lead to the formation of a state-anxiety in an individual.

Scrutiny Fear

Still other researchers (Mattick et al., 1989) discuss CA as what is called a **scrutiny fear**; which stems from an activity that does not necessarily involve interacting with other people, but is simply the fear of being in a situation where one is being watched or observed, or one perceives him or herself as being watched, while undertaking an activity. When asked to categorize their own type of CA, many people will identify with this phenomenon.

In order for anybody to effectively deal with CA, the first step is to consider what may be its primary cause. CA is what is known as a **resultant condition**; and those who are dealing with the challenge will recognize different intensities associated with different situations or triggers. This means that overcoming the condition requires first that you recognize, and then minimize, the cause. Each person is different, and so each case of CA is personal and unique. Trait-anxiety can be one contributing factor to CA, but is often part of a much larger condition. It is important to understand that, while the techniques discussed here would help in improving an individual's approach to public speaking opportunities, we do not claim that these techniques would work with more significant personality disorders. However, both the presence of state- anxiety, and the appearance of scrutiny fear, can be effectively addressed through the application of cognitive restructuring (CR) and careful, deliberate experience.

How little do they see what is, who frame their hasty judgments upon that which seems. ~ Robert Southey

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12.5: Cognitive Restructuring and Building Confidence

Learning Objectives

- define cognitive restructuring
- learn strategies for building confidence

Cognitive Restructuring

Since the major difference between "presenting" to a public audience versus "presenting" to a small group of close friends involves one's attitude about the situation. Overcoming CA is as much a matter of changing one's attitude as it is developing one's skills as a speaker. A change in attitude can be fostered through a self-reflective regimen called **cognitive restructuring** (CR), which is an internal process through which individuals can deliberately adjust how they perceive an action or experience (Mattick et al., 1989).

Cognitive Restructuring is a three-step, internal process:

1. Identify objectively what you think
2. Identify any inconsistencies between perception and reality
3. Replace destructive thinking with supportive thinking

These steps are easy to understand, but perhaps may be a bit difficult to execute! The first step is to identify objectively what you are thinking as you approach a public speaking opportunity. Recall your habitual frame of reference. The first step in CR is to shine a bright light directly on it. This will be different for each student undertaking the process.

Sources of Apprehension

After years of interviewing students from my classes, the two concerns most often described are the feeling of being the center of attention – as if you are under some collective microscope with everybody's eyes on you; and the feeling that the audience is just waiting for you to make a mistake or slip up somehow – and that their disapproval will be swift, immediate, and embarrassing. Let's discuss how CR might be applied to each of these widely-held perceptions.

Impact of Apprehension

Many people worry about being the "center of attention," feeling like "everyone is staring at me." In reality, audiences look at speakers to show they are listening, not to intimidate. Eye contact, especially in U.S. culture, is seen as respectful and supportive. Another common fear is being judged or making mistakes. But most audiences do not expect perfection. Listeners usually empathize with speakers and prefer when presentations go smoothly. Instead of assuming "everyone is judging me," it helps to reframe the situation: the audience is giving you a chance to speak and wants you to succeed.



Figure 12.5.1 Speaking From the Heart

Learning Confidence

When preparing for a presentation, it's normal to worry—"What if I make a mistake? What if they don't like it?" Cognitive restructuring (CR) helps by shifting perspective: instead of assuming the audience is critical, remember they want you to succeed just as you want other speakers to succeed. CR takes time and practice since it involves breaking old habits, not instant change. Overcoming communication anxiety (CA) also requires building speaking skills. Careful preparation and deliberate practice reduce uncertainty and boost confidence, making success more likely.

It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech. ~ Mark Twain

Table 12.5.1 Impact of Cognitive Restructuring

Before Cognitive Restructuring:	**After Cognitive Restructuring:**
One recognizes that they are under scrutiny by the audience.	One is less worried about being looked at while speaking.
One is worried about being judged harshly.	One recognizes that audiences want speaker success.
One is worried about making an embarrassing mistake.	One recognizes that audiences will empathize.

Building Confidence

Preparation is the most reliable way to reduce nervousness—more practice leads to more confidence. But not all practice is equal. Like athletes who train under game-like conditions, speakers need to rehearse in ways that simulate real presentations, not just think through ideas in their heads. Too often, students mistake writing a paper for preparing a speech, which leaves them unprepared and anxious. Effective practice means going beyond "knowing the material" to actually practicing delivery, so the speaker knows *what to say and how to say it* in front of an audience.

Visualize Success

Athletes and performers often use visualization to prepare—imagining the play, movement, or outcome so they can perform smoothly under pressure. Speakers can do the same by picturing themselves presenting with confidence, using clear gestures and tone, and seeing the audience respond positively. Visualizing success helps build the mindset needed to achieve it.

Breathe. Let go. And remind yourself that this very moment is the only one you know you have for sure. ~ Oprah Winfrey

Breathe and Release

One type of pre-presentation exercise that might be helpful is based on a therapeutic idea called **systematic desensitization**, which is a multi-stage regimen to help patients deal with phobias through coping mechanisms. Going through both the cognitive and behavioral aspects of systematic desensitization often requires weeks of concerted effort to overcome the body's involuntary reactions to stress. That sort of psychological therapy involves gradual exposure to what produces the anxiety, long-term self-reflection, and mental discipline. Here, we will discuss a shortened version called "**breathe and release**." This is a short-cut relaxation technique that could be useful for nervous speakers – especially those who are concerned with the physical manifestations of nervousness, such as shaky hands or knees.

The key to "breathe and release" is to understand that when nervous tension results in minor trembling, the effort of trying to keep one's hands from shaking can contribute to the whole situation – that is, trying to stop literally can make it worse! Therefore, the best approach is through relaxation.



Figure 12.5.2 Confident Stance

"Breathe and Release" involves three steps:

1. Imagine the nervousness within your body. Imagine that energy bubbling inside you, like liquid being cooked.
2. Draw that energy to a high point within your body with a deep, cleansing breath. Imagine this cleansing breath to be acting like a vacuum – drawing up all of the bubbling liquid.
3. Release the energy by deliberately relaxing the entirety of your upper extremities – not just your hands, or even your hands and arms – but all the way from your fingertips to the bottom edges of your shoulder blades. Imagine how keeping any part of your upper extremities tense would result in a "kink" in the release valve, and so complete relaxation is the key to success. Remember: Relax everything from the fingertips to the very bottom edges of your shoulder blades.

"Breathe and Release" is something that can be done even as one walks to the front of the classroom or boardroom to begin speaking. Many speakers, especially those who are concerned about the physical manifestations of nervousness, have used this relaxation technique effectively.

I've a grand memory for forgetting. ~ Robert Louis Stevenson

Minimize What You Memorize

Avoid writing and memorizing a full script for your speech. Instead, focus on being *conversant*—knowing your topic well

enough to explain it naturally, as you would in everyday conversation. This approach keeps your delivery fluid and lets you respond to audience reactions, rather than being tied to exact wording. Memorizing every line often causes stress and makes you less adaptable. A better strategy is to carefully prepare and possibly script only the introduction and conclusion, while keeping the body flexible. In short: *minimize what you memorize—familiarize instead.*

If I don't train enough, of course I'm nervous. ~ Haile Gebrselassie

Practice Out Loud

Remember the very first time you tried to do anything – a game, a sport, an activity, anything at all. How good were you out of the gate? Perhaps you had talent or were gifted with a "feel" for what you were doing. But even then, didn't you get better with more experience? Nobody does anything the very best they can on their very first attempt, and everyone – even the most talented among us – will benefit from effective practice.

Speaking in public is no different from any other activity in this way. To maximize the chance that your presentation will come out smooth and polished, you will need to hear it all the way through. By practicing out loud, from the beginning to the ending, you will be able to listen to your whole speech and properly gauge the flow of your entire presentation. Additionally, without at least one complete out-loud practice, there will be no way to accurately estimate the length of your speech and your preparation will remain insufficient. When dealing with CA, the last thing you want is to leave some questions unanswered in your own mind! The out-loud "dress rehearsal" is the single, most important element to your preparation. Without it, you will be delivering your presentation in full for the first time when it counts the most. Putting yourself at that sort of disadvantage isn't wise, and is easily avoided.

Tip:

Consider your current method of preparing a public presentation. At some point, you will have gathered notes and information together. That represents an opportune moment for your first out-loud practice. You might even consider trying that initial practice without the benefit of any notes. Stand up; start speaking; see what comes out! Such a practice can serve as an "oral first draft" in the same vein as any written first draft of a paper, and can answer a number of questions for you:

1. Where, during your presentation, are you most – and least – conversant?
2. Where, during your presentation, are you most in need of supportive notes?
3. What do your notes need to contain?

Prepare for your public presentation by speaking and listening to yourself, rather than by writing, editing, and rewriting. Remember that when you are having a conversation, you never use the same sort of language and syntax as you do when you are writing a formal paper. Practice with the goal of becoming conversant in your topic, not fluent with a script.

You can't hire someone to practice for you. ~ H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Putting it all Together

This chapter's tools—especially **out-loud practice** and **Cognitive Restructuring (CR)**—work best when you tailor them to your own worries. Start by naming your top concerns (e.g., being the center of attention, who's in the audience, freezing up). **Write them down, rank them,** and plan how you'll reduce each risk.

Audit your preparation. Are you preparing like it's a paper (over-writing, scripting every line)? Shift to speaking prep: **practice out loud early and often,** then create concise speaking notes. Remember, breaking habits takes time; be deliberate and notice what helps.

CA has many causes (internal and external), so combine **mindset work** with **skill building**: use CR to reframe fears, and strengthen delivery through repeated, realistic practice.

Quick Checklist:

- Identify and prioritize your specific anxieties.
- Use CR to replace unhelpful thoughts with supportive ones.
- Practice out loud during prep—not just after writing notes.
- Speak more; write and revise less.
- Adjust your routine based on what actually works for you.

Take your time, do the work, and trust that consistent, effective preparation lowers anxiety and improves performance.

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13: INFORMATIVE SPEAKING

13.1: Functions of Informative Speeches
13.2: Role of Speaker
13.3: Types of Informative Speeches
13.4: Developing Informative Speeches

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13.1: Functions of Informative Speeches

Learning Objectives

- understand the importance of informative speaking
- describe the functions of informative speeches

Informative Speaking

Every day you give others information in an informal way, whether you realize it or not. You give your grandparents driving directions to your college campus. You tell your professor about a breaking news story. You teach a friend how to ride a motorcycle. You explain to your significant other your spiritual philosophy. You show a co-worker how to operate the cash register. You help your younger brother build his first Facebook page. Or you share your summer travel experience with your roommate. Without a doubt, information plays a vital role in our everyday lives. In the dictionary, the term "inform" has several meanings, including to impart knowledge; to animate or inspire; to give information or enlightenment; to furnish evidence; to make aware of something; to communicate something of interest or special importance; to give directions; and to provide intelligence, news, facts or data. When you deliver an **informative speech**, your primary purpose is to give your audience information that they did not already know, or to teach them more about a topic with which they are already familiar.

Your ability to give informative speeches is one of the most important skills you will ever master, and it will be used both during the course of your career, and in your personal life. A pharmaceutical sales representative who can't describe the products' chemical composition, uses and side effects, will have trouble making a sale. A high school math teacher who can't explain algebra in simple terms will have students who will not learn. A manager who can't teach workers how to assemble microchips will have a department with low productivity and quality. And a little league coach who is unable to instruct players on batting and catching techniques will have a disadvantaged team. It is easy to imagine how difficult it would be to go about the business of our daily lives without the ability to give and receive information. Speeches to inform are the most common types of speeches (Gladis, 1999), so speech writers should give priority to learning how to construct them.

Not only is there an art in knowing a thing, but also a certain art in teaching it. ~ Cicero

A speaker hasn't taught until the audience has learned.

Functions of Informative Speeches

People encounter a number of formal and informal informative presentations throughout their day, and these presentations have several consequences. First, informative presentations *provide people with knowledge*. When others share facts or circumstances associated with some topic, our comprehension, awareness or familiarity is increased. The speaker imparts information, and this information is turned into knowledge. A music teacher describes the difference between a note and chord as an introduction to music. When issuing a warning to a teenager, a police officer explains the nature of the moving violation. A travel agent clarifies for customers the policies for airline ticket refunds. Participants at a cultural fair are enlightened by a shaman explaining her spiritual practices. Knowledge helps us to understand the world around us, enables us to make connections, and helps us to predict the future.

All men by nature desire knowledge. ~ Aristotle

Second, informative presentations *shape our perceptions*. These presentations can affect how people see a subject by bringing it to light, or may influence what is seen as important by virtue of directing attention to the subject (Osborn & Osborn, 1991). Information helps us to interpret our experiences, it shapes our values and beliefs, it may alter our self-concept, and it gives meaning to situations. Imagine you meet your new boss, and she is very curt and pre-occupied during the first staff meeting. You may at first perceive her as being rude, unless later you find out that just before your meeting with her she learned that her father had been hospitalized with a stroke. Learning this new information allowed you to see the situation from a different perspective. In the same way, informative presentations enable us to get a sense of "the big picture" and improve our ability to think and evaluate.



Figure 13.1.1 Home for Sale

Some informative presentations may be aimed at helping listeners understand the number, variety, and quality of alternatives available to them (Hogan et al., 2010). Consequently, informative presentations also serve to *articulate alternatives*. A car sales associate might explain to you the features of one car in comparison to another car in order to help you differentiate between the models. A doctor might explain to your grandmother her treatment options for arthritis. A fitness trainer may demonstrate to you several types of exercises to help you strengthen your abdominal muscles and reduce your waistline. If you go to a temporary employment agency, a staff member may provide you will a range of job options that fit your qualifications. Successful informative presentations provide information which improves listeners' ability to make wise decisions, because they understand all of their options (Jaffe, 1998).

Finally, informative presentations *enhance our ability to survive and evolve*. Our existence and safety depend upon the successful communication of facts and knowledge. An informative speech "helps keep countries developing, communicates valuable and useful information in thousands of areas, and continues to change, improve or upgrade the lives of audiences" (Wilbur, 2000, p. 99). For thousands of years, cultural and technical knowledge was passed from generation to generation orally. Even today with the presence of the internet, you are still likely to get a good amount of information verbally. We have all seen "how to" YouTube videos, and although these have a significant visual components, the "experts" still have to give a verbal explanation. Through meetings, presentations and face-to- face interactions, we gain information about how to perform and improve in our jobs. To keep our children safe, we don't give them an instruction manual, we sit down with them and explain things. All of the knowledge we accumulate while we live will be passed down to (hopefully) improve on the lives of those who come after us. Much of this information will be passed down in the form of a presentation.

Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe. ~ H. G. Wells

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13.2: Role of Speaker

Learning Objectives

- describe how speakers should be objective
- consider ways to increase credibility
- understand the speaker's role in an informative speech

Now that you understand the importance of informing others, this next section will show you the speakers' responsibilities for preparing and presenting informative speeches.

Informative Speakers Should Be Objective

Most public speaking texts discuss three **general purposes** for speeches: to inform, to persuade, and to entertain. Although these general purposes are theoretically distinct, in practice, they tend to overlap. Even in situations when the occasion calls for an informative speech (one which enhances understanding), often persuasive and entertaining elements are present. First, all informative speeches have a persuasive component by virtue of the fact that the speaker tries to convince the audience that the facts presented are accurate (Harlan, 1993). Second, a well-written speech can make even the most dry, technical information entertaining through engaging illustrations, colorful language, unusual facts, and powerful visuals.

In spite of this caveat, when planning your informative speech your primary *intent* will be to increase listeners' knowledge in an impartial way. For instance, in a speech about urban legends (Craughwell, 2000), your specific purpose statement may be: "*At the end of my speech, my audience will understand what an urban legend is, how urban legends are spread, and common variations of urban legends*." The topic you choose is not as important as your approach to the material in determining whether your speech is informative or persuasive (Peterson, Stephan, & White, 1992). Can you imagine how speeches on witchcraft, stem cell research, the federal deficit, or hybrid cars could be written either to inform or persuade? Informative speeches need to be as objective, fair, and unbiased as possible. You are not asking your audience to take action or convincing them to change their mind. You are teaching them something and allowing them to decide for themselves what to do with the information. When writing your speech, present all sides of the story and try to remove all unrelated facts, personal opinions, and emotions (Westerfield, 2002).

Informative Speakers Should Be Credible

An objective approach also enhances a speaker's **credibility**. Credibility, or ethos, refers to an audience's perception that the speaker is well prepared and qualified to speak on a topic (Fraleigh & Tuman, 2011).

Table 13.2.1 Boost Your Credibility

Establish Expertise By:	◈ Citing reputable sources ◈ Making sure your facts are accurate ◈ Covering your points in enough detail to demonstrate your knowledge ◈ Revealing your personal expertise with the topic

Table 13.2.1 Boost Your Credibility	
Help the Audience Identify with You By:	◈ Wearing appropriate and attractive clothing ◈ Mentioning what you have in common ◈ Being friendly and enthusiastic ◈ Relating to listeners' situations, feelings, and motives
Show You are Telling the Truth By:	◈ Presenting both sides of an issue ◈ Sharing what motivated you to select your topic ◈ Having open, natural nonverbals that correspond to what you say ◈ Approaching the speech with ethics and positive intentions for your audience

Peterson, Stephan, and White (1992) explain that there are two kinds of credibility; the reputation that precedes you before you give your speech (antecedent credibility) and the credibility you develop during the course of your speech (consequent credibility). In many cases, the audience has no prior knowledge of the speaker, so they make judgments about the quality of the evidence and arguments in the speech. In addition, they look at and listen to the speaker to determine if s/he is a reliable source of information.

Audience members have no motivation to listen to a speaker they perceive as lacking authority or credibility --- except maybe to mock the speaker. To avoid this pitfall, there are at least three ways to boost your credibility as a speaker; by establishing your expertise, helping your audience identify with you, and showing you are telling the truth (see examples in Table 16.1). It seems to be common sense that we do not listen to speakers who do not know what they are talking about, who cannot relate to us, or who give the impression of being dishonest. However, in planning informative speeches, we can get so wrapped up in the topic that is easy to forget about the elements of credibility. Just remember that in order to teach, we first have to show that we are worthy of our audience's attention.

In the end, you make your reputation and you have your success based upon credibility and being able to provide people who are really hungry for information what they want. ~ Brit Hume

Informative Speakers are Knowledgeable

Good informative speeches contain a number of different source citations throughout the speech. To show that the information you present is accurate and complete, these sources should be up-to-date, reliable, unbiased, and directly relevant to your topic. Even if you plan to give a speech about an activity you have done all of your life, you will still need to seek out additional sources for your speech. By all means, you should cite and use your own experiences with the topic, but if you want to appear objective, you will need to show that your ideas and experiences correspond with others'. Using a variety of sound reference materials helps you appear well- informed and more trustworthy.

In our information age, people are fortunate to have unlimited and free access to information on virtually any topic they can imagine via the internet. Unfortunately, in addition to the credible information, the internet contains an abundance of garbage. Good speech writers know that it is important to avoid weak or questionable sources (e.g. Wikipedia, Britannica.com or Ask.com) when constructing their speeches. Start by asking what you know, find out what the experts know, and then move to find out what information other sources can provide (Gladis, 1999). You can search your library catalog or*Amazon.com* to locate books (which provide details and depth), and then check out or order these books via interlibrary loan (often free) if they are not available in your library. Explain not only *how* something is done, but also *why* it is done for a great speech (MacInnis, 2006). This variety gives a speech depth and a level of interest that cannot be achieved merely by doing a Google search and using the first five websites that pop up. For additional ideas on locating sources, "*Sources of interesting information*" is provided at the end of this chapter.

The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity. ~ Dorothy Parker

Informative Speakers Make the Topic Relevant

When you are selecting your topic and thinking about what you want to accomplish in your informative speech, two factors should drive your decision. Foremost, you want to select a topic that holds a high degree of interest for you (i.e. the topic is meaningful to you). Students who feel at a loss for topic ideas should turn their attention to their own lives and activities. If you like to play video games, you might give a speech about how they are made. If you have a passion for ska reggae music, you might bring in MP3 cuts to help define the boundaries of this music genre. If you have to work three jobs to help pay for school, you could give a speech on effective time management. Genuine curiosity will make the research and preparation process easier. Further, when you have enthusiasm for a topic, it shows when you speak. On the other hand, if you do not really care about your topic, your audience is not likely to care either.

In addition to having relevance for you, it is crucial that you tie your topic directly to your listeners. Early in the speech, give listeners at least one reason why they should care about your topic and the ways in which the information will be beneficial or entertaining (Morreale & Bovee, 1998). Establishing a motive for your audience to listen to you is commonly referred to by the acronym **WIIFM** – "What's in it for me?" This is what the audience consciously or unconsciously asks when you start speaking (Urech, 1998). To establish WIIFM, you clearly link the topic to the listeners' values, attitudes, beliefs and lifestyle. Consider not only what the audience *want*s to hear, but also what they *need* to hear (Gladis, 1999; Maxey & O'Connor, 2006). Take the topic of retirement planning as an example. Younger listeners may not perceive this as relevant to their lives when they are not yet making a steady salary. But, if you can demonstrate how investing even a small amount every month can grow to a considerable nest egg by retirement age, and that getting into the habit of saving early can lower the number of years they have to work, the topic becomes more interesting for them.

Making the topic relevant for your audience can also mean that you show them how to apply the information immediately. In a speech on relaxation techniques, a speaker can lead the audience through a simple stress reduction exercise they can use at home. For a speech on handwriting analysis, listeners can be given paper, asked to write a sample sentence and shown how to interpret some points on the sample. If the audience members have laptops, a speaker can show them how to improve one of their digital photos. If listeners can use the information they learn quickly, they tend to remember it longer, and they are more likely to try the action again later (Nelson, et al., 2010).

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13.3: Types of Informative Speeches

Learning Objectives

- Describe the types of informative speeches

In the last section we examined how informative speakers need to be objective, credible, knowledgeable, and how they need to make the topic relevant to their audience. This section discusses the four primary types of informative speeches. These include definitional speeches, descriptive speeches, explanatory speeches, and demonstration speeches.

Definitional Speeches

In definitional speeches the speaker attempts to set forth the meaning of concepts, theories, philosophies, or issues that may be unfamiliar to the audience. In these types of speeches, speakers may begin by giving the historical derivation, classification, or synonyms of terms or the background of the subject. In a speech on "How to identify a sociopath," the speaker may answer these questions: Where did the word 'sociopath' come from? What is a sociopath? How many sociopaths are there in the population? What are the symptoms? Carefully define your terminology to give shape to things the audience cannot directly sense. Describing the essential attributes of one concept compared to another (as through use of analogies) can increase understanding as well. For a speech on "Elderly Abuse," the speaker may compare this type of abuse to child or spousal abuse for contrast.

Regardless of the listeners' level of knowledge about the subject, it is very important in these types of speeches to show the relevance of the topic to their lives. Often the topics discussed in definitional speeches are abstract --- distanced from reality. So provide explicit, real-life examples and applications of the subject matter. If you were going to give a speech about civil rights, you would need to go beyond commonly held meanings and show the topic in a new light. In this type of speech, the speaker points out the unique and distinguishing properties or boundaries of a concept *in a particular context* (Rinehart, 2002). The meaning of "civil rights" has changed significantly over time. What does it mean today compared to the 1960s? How will knowing this distinction help audience members? What are some specific incidents involving civil rights issues in current news? What changes in civil rights legislation might listeners see in their lifetimes?

Descriptive Speeches

The purpose of **descriptive speeches** is to provide a detailed, vivid, word picture of a person, animal, place, or object. Audiences should carry away in their minds a clear vision of the subject (Osborn & Osborn, 1991). Consider this description of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India by Steve Cassidy (edited for length).

> *To gaze in wonder at that magnificent dome and elegant gardens will be a moment that you remember for the rest of your life. The Taj Mahal just takes your breath away. What is immediately striking is its graceful symmetry - geometric lines run through formal gardens ending in a white marble platform. Atop this platform is great white bulbous dome complemented by four towering minarets in each corner. The whole image shimmers in a reflecting pool flanked by beautiful gardens - the effect is magical. The first stretch by the reflecting pool is where most people pose for their photos. But we were impressed by the fresh, green gardens. As you approach through the gardens two mosques come into view flanking the Taj - both exquisitely carved and built of red sandstone.*

Sample Definitional Speech Outline
Title: *"Life is suffering," and Other Buddhist Teachings* (Thompson, 1999)
Specific Purpose: At the end of my speech, my audience will understand the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path in Buddhism
Central Idea: Regardless of your religious beliefs, Buddhist philosophy teaches a number of useful lessons you can apply to your own life.

Sample Definitional Speech Outline	
I.	Four Noble Truths A. All life involves *dukkha* (suffering) B. Suffering is caused by *tanha* (longing for things to be other than they are) C. If this longing stops (*nirodha*), suffering will cease D. The way to eliminate longing is to follow the Eightfold Path
II.	The Noble Eightfold Path (the Middle Way) A. Right view B. Right intention C. Right speech D. Right action E. Right livelihood F. Right effort G. Right mindfulness H. Right contemplation

In the descriptive speech, determine the characteristics, features, functions, or fine points of the topic. What makes the person unique? How did the person make you feel? What adjectives apply to the subject? What kind of material is the object made from? What shape is it? What color is it? What does it smell like? Is it part of a larger system? Can it be seen by the naked eye? What is its geography or location in space? How has it changed or evolved over time? How does it compare to a similar object? When preparing for the speech, try to think of ways to appeal to as many of the senses as possible. As an example, in a speech about different types of curried dishes, you could probably verbally describe the difference between yellow, red, and green curry, but the speech will have more impact if the audience can see, smell, and taste samples.

Sample Descriptive Speech Outline	
Title: *Easter Island: The Navel of the World* (Fischer, 2006)	
Specific Purpose: At the end of my speech, my audience will be able to visualize some of the main attractions on Easter Island.	
Central Idea: Easter Island hosts a number of ancient, mysterious, and beautiful attractions that make it an ideal vacation destination.	
I.	Stone Giants – “Moai” A. Average 13 feet high; 14 tons B. Play sacred role for Rapa Nui (native inhabitants) C. Central Ahu ceremonial sites

Sample Descriptive Speech Outline	
II.	Coastline activities A. Beaches B. Snorkeling & Scuba C. Surfing
III.	Rano Kau Chilean National Park A. Giant crater B. Sheer cliffs to ocean C. Sea birds



Figure 13.3.1 Easter Island Statue

Explanatory Speeches

An **explanatory speech** (also known as a briefing) is similar to the descriptive speech in that they both share the function of clarifying the topic. But explanatory speeches focus on reports of current and historical events, customs, transformations, inventions, policies, outcomes, and options. Whereas descriptive speeches attempt to paint a picture with words so that audiences can vicariously experience it, explanatory speeches focus on the *how* or *why* of a subject and its consequences. Thus, a speaker might give a *descriptive* speech on the daily life of Marie Antoinette, or an *explanatory* speech on how she came to her death. Recall that definitional speeches focus on delineating concepts or issues. In this case, a speaker might give a *defintional* speech about the Emergency Economic Stabiliztion Act of 2008, or an *explanatory* speech on why the financial bailout was necessary for U.S. financial stability.

If a manager wanted to inform employees about a new workplace internet use policy, s/he might cover questions like: Why was a policy implemented? How will it help? What happens if people do not follow established policies? Explanatory speeches are less concerned with appealing to the senses than connecting the topic to a series of related other subjects to enhance a deep

understanding (McKerrow, Gronbeck, Ehninger, & Monroe, 2000). For example, to explain the custom of the Thai *wai* greeting (hands pressed together as in prayer), you also need to explain how it originated to show one had no weapons, and the ways it is tied to religion, gender, age, and status.

Sample Explanatory Speech Outline	
Title: *Giant Waves, Death, and Devastation: The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami* (National Geographic, 2006)	
Specific Purpose: At the end of my speech, my audience will be aware of the nature of the 2004 Tsunami and the destruction it caused.	
Central Idea: The 2004 Asian Tsunami was one of the worst natural disasters in human history in terms of magnitude, loss of human life, and enduring impact.	
I.	Geological event A. Earthquake epicenter and magnitude B. Tsunami forms (waves reach up to 100 feet) C. Tsunami strikes land of various countries with no warning
II.	Human casualties reach almost 230,000 – top 10 of all natural disasters A. The countries and people involved B. Loss of food, water, hospitals, housing, electricity, and plumbing C. Threat of disease
III.	Ongoing effects A. Environmental destruction B. Economic devastation C. Psychological trauma

Demonstration Speeches

The most practical of all informative speeches, a demonstration speech shows listeners how some process is accomplished or how to perform it themselves. The focus is on a chronological explanation of some process (how potato chips are made), procedure (how to fight fires on a submarine), application (how to use the calendar function in Outlook), or course of action (how court cases proceed to Supreme Court status). Speakers might focus on processes that have a series of steps with a specific beginning and end (how to sell a home by yourself) or the process may be continuous (how to maintain the hard drive on your computer to prevent crashes). Demonstration speeches can be challenging to write due to the fact that the process may involve several objects, a set of tools, materials, or a number of related relationships or events (Rinehart, 2002). Nevertheless, these types of speeches provide the greatest opportunity for audience members to get involved or apply the information later.

When preparing this speech, remember first to keep the safety of the audience in mind. One speaker severely burned his professor when he accidently spilled hot oil from a wok on her. Another student nearly took the heads off listeners when he was demonstrating how to swing a baseball bat. Keep in mind also that you may need to bring in examples or pictures of completed steps in order to make efficient use of your time. Just think of the way that cooking demonstrations are done on TV --- the ingredients are pre-measured, the food is pre-mixed, and the mixture magically goes from uncooked to cooked in a matter of seconds. Finally, if you are having your audience participate during your presentation (making an origami sculpture), know what

their knowledge level is so that you don't make them feel unintelligent if they are not successful. Practice your speech with friends who know nothing about the topic to gauge if listeners can do what you are asking them to do in the time allotted.

Sample Demonstration Speech Outline	
Title: *How to Survive if You Get Stranded in the Wilderness* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2006).	
Specific Purpose: At the end of my speech my audience will understand what to do if they unexpectedly become stranded in the wilderness.	
Central Idea: You can greatly improve your ability to stay alive and safe in the wilderness by learning a few simple survival techniques.	
I.	Size up the situation A. Size up the surroundings B. Size up your physical and mental states C. Size up your equipment (handout "What to Include in a Survival Kit")
II.	Survival Basics A. Obtaining water B. Acquiring food C. Building a fire D. Locating shelter
III.	Finding help A. Call or signal rescue personnel B. Wilderness navigation C. Leaving "bread crumb" trail

Any subject can be made interesting, and therefore any subject can be made boring. ~ Hilaire Belloc

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13.4: Developing Informative Speeches

Learning Objectives

- Understand different ways to add and maintain interest in an informative speech

The first sections of this chapter explained the importance of informative speaking, the functions of informative speeches, the role of the informative speaker, and the four major types of informative speeches. This final section of the chapter discusses three goals in developing informative speeches and advice for increasing the effectiveness of your speech. These three goals include 1) arousing the interest of your audience, 2) presenting information in a way that can be understood, and 3) helping the audience remember what you have said (Fujishin, 2000).

Generate and Maintain Interest

Use Attention-Getting Elements

Before you capture the interest of an audience, you have to get their attention. As you know, attention getters are used in the introduction of a speech, but **attention getters** can also be used throughout your speech to maintain an audience's attention. There are a number of techniques you can use that will naturally draw listeners' attention (German, et al., 2010).

Intensity refers to something that has a high or extreme degree of emotion, color, volume, strength or other defining characteristic. In a speech about sharks' senses, showing how sharks smell 10,000 times better than humans would be an example of the intensity principle. Novelty involves those things that are new or unusual. Discussing the recent invention of the flesh-eating mushroom death suit developed by Jae Rhim Lee would be novel. This suit is designed to help bodies decompose naturally above ground to avoid the use of dangerous embalming chemicals.

Contrast can also be used to draw attention through comparison to something that is different or opposite. This works best when the differences are significant. If you were showing the audience how to make hot sauce, and you showed a bar graph comparing the scoville units (level of hotness) of different chili peppers, this would be contrast. Jalapenos rate at 2500 – 8000 scoville units, habaneros rate at 100,000 – 350,000, and the naga jolokia rates at 855,000 – 1,041,241. Audiences will also attend to movement or activity. To employ this technique, the speaker can either use action words, well-chosen movements, an increased rate of speech, or s/he can show action with video. A speech describing or showing extreme sports with high levels of risk, a fast pace, or amazing stunts could be used to illustrate activity.

Finally, humor can be used to draw attention to a subject or point, but be sure that it is relevant and in good taste. In a speech about the devotion of Trekkies (Star Trek fans), you could share the example of Tony Alleyne who designed and outfitted his flat in England as a replica of the deck of the Voyager. You could also direct the audience's attention to couples who have wedding ceremonies spoken in Klingon.

Tell a Story

Story telling is not only the basis for most of our entertainment; it is also one of the best ways to teach an audience (Carlson, 2005). Also known as narratives, stories typically have a beginning in which the characters and setting are introduced, a rise in action, some complication or problem, and a resolution. Stories with compelling characters can be used in a creative way to weave facts otherwise dry and technical facts together (Walters, 1995), as in a speech about preparing a space shuttle for take-off from a mouse's perspective. Jaffe (1998) differentiates between three types of narratives that can be used in informative speeches. The first type of story is a natural reality in which natural or scientific facts are brought together in chronological accounts, as in the formation of the Grand Canyon. The second narrative involves social realities which detail historic events, and the development of cultures and institutions. The last kind of story, the ultimate reality, is focused on profound philosophical and spiritual questions like "Where do we come from?" and "What happens to us when we die?"

Nursery rhymes and song lyrics familiar to the audience can also be used in an interactive way to get listeners interested in the topic (Maxey & O'Connor, 2006). In a speech about the global population explosion, you could ask audience to finish the phrase

“There was an old woman who lived in a shoe…” Common commercials, lyrics to Beatles songs, holiday songs, and children’s games are universal.

Commercial jingles and song lyrics also work to get the audience involved. You could start a speech on boating safety with these lyrics: Just sit right back / And you'll hear a tale / A tale of a fateful trip / That started from this tropic port / Aboard this tiny ship (from *Gilligan’s Island*). Depending on the make-up of your audience, you might use lyrics from Johnny Cash, Billy Holiday, The Doors, The Beatles, Jay- Z, The Judds or the Arctic Monkeys. Just remember you probably can’t read all of the lyrics, you need to make sure the lyrics are directly linked to your topic, and you should be sure to cite the artist and song title.



Figure 13.4.1 Guitar Player

Be Creative

Speakers who are different are memorable (Maxey & O'Connor, 2006). To give your speech impact, be imaginative and dare to push the envelope of conformity. When you have spent time researching a topic, you may be able to envision ways to incorporate surprising facts, props or visuals that make your presentation different from others, and therefore more memorable. You could dress like a Shakespearian actor for a speech about the famous playwright. You could have the audience move their chairs and take part in a yoga demonstration. Or you might use your own audience plants to help with a speech entitled “Behind the Scenes of TV Talk Shows.” When one student got up to speak, he drew a row of houses on the blackboard and then began to drink a glass of water and speak about the life giving properties of water. After making a few comments, he threw the glass of water on the blackboard --- erasing most of the houses. Then he began his speech on the devastating effects of a flood (be sure to get your professor’s permission before you do something like this!). Another student giving a speech about “Clowning” had two actual clowns wait in the hall until she was ready to bring them in and show off their make-up and costumes. The speaker was wise to have her cohorts in the room just long enough to make the point (but not the entire time which would distract from the speaker), and the audience was attentive and grateful for the variety. Hanks and Parry (1991) explain that anyone can be creative, if s/he wants to be and is willing to make the effort.

Table 13.4.1 Tips for Jump Starting Your Creativity
From *Everyday Creativity* by Carlin Flora (2009)

- Take a different way to work
- Collaborate with others with complementary skills
- Seek inspiration in beautiful surroundings
- Start working on the problem right away
- Work in a blue room (it boosts creativity)
- Get a hobby or play music
- Think about your problem right before falling asleep

For some tips on how to foster your creativity, see Table 13.4.1. However, you need to remember that creativity is just a tool to help you teach your audience. Do not overlook the requirements of the occasion, the content of your research, or the needs of your audience in your zeal to be creative.

The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt. ~ Sylvia Plath

Stimulate Audience Intellect

Most people have a genuine desire to understand the world around them, to seek out the truth, and learn how to solve problems. The role of the informative speaker is to satisfy this desire to learn and know. To illustrate our quest for knowledge, consider the success of the Discovery Channel, the Learning Channel, the History Channel, the Food Network and other educational broadcasts. So how do we appeal to the minds of listeners? Think about all of the information we encounter every day but do not have time to pursue. Think about subjects that *you* would like to know more about. Ask what information would be universally interesting and useful for listeners. Many people fly on airplanes, but do they know how to survive a plane crash? People also share many ordinary illnesses, so what are some common home remedies? All of the people on earth originated someplace, so who were our ancient ancestors?

In addition to finding topics that relate to listeners, the information we supply should be up to date. For instance, Egypt recently had a revolution, and if you are giving a speech on traveling to the pyramids, you should be aware of this. When you are talking about a topic that your audience is familiar with, you should share little known facts or paint the subject in a new light. In a speech about a famous person, you might depict what they are like behind the scenes, or what they were like growing up. In a speech about a new technology, you might also talk about the inventors. In a speech about a famous city, you could discuss the more infamous landmarks and attractions.



Create Coherence

Organize Logically

Several types of organizational patterns are discussed in the *Selecting and Arranging Main Points* chapter. Using these as a starting point, you should make sure the overall logic of the speech is well thought out. If you were giving speech best suited to chronological order, but presented the steps out of order, it would be very difficult to follow. Those of you who have seen the movie *Memento* (which presented the sequence of events backwards), may have noticed how difficult it was to explain the plot to others. In a logical speech, the points you are trying to draw are obvious, the supporting materials are coherent and correspond exactly to the thesis, and the main points are mutually exclusive and flow naturally from start to finish.

Clarity of thought is critical in presenting information. As Peggy Noonan (1998, p. 64) argues:

The most moving thing in a speech is always the logic. It's never the flowery words and flourishes, it's not sentimental exhortations, it's never the faux poetry we're all subjected to these days. It's the logic; it's the thinking behind your case. A good case well argued and well said is inherently moving. It shows respect for the brains of the listeners. There is an implicit compliment in it. It shows that you are a serious person and that you are talking to other serious persons.

When planning your speech, ask questions like: What information needs to come first? What organizational pattern best suits the topic? What information must be shared or omitted to aid in audience understanding? What points or sub-points should be grouped together to aid listeners' understanding?



Table 13.4.2 Simplify Your Language

Low Impact	High Impact
Under the present circumstances	Currently
At the present time	Now
Are in agreement with	Agree

Table 13.4.2 Simplify Your Language	
Due to the fact that	Because
Is fully operational	Works
In close proximity to	Near
Of sufficient magnitude	Big enough
In close proximity to	Near
Of sufficient magnitude	Big enough
In the event of	If
Each and every one	Each
In the course of	During
Never before or since	Never
Deciduous trees (jargon)	Trees that lose their leaves
Somnolent (jargon)	Drowsy
Awesome (slang)	Impressive
Put the bit on (slang)	Borrow
No brainer (cliché)	Easy decision
An arm and a leg	Expensive

Table 13.4.2 Simplify Your Language	
Vertically challenged (euphemism)	Short
Gone to the great beyond (euphemism)	Dead

Use Simple Language

One common mistake that speech writers make when they are writing their speech is to use the same language that they would use in a written document. Experienced speech writers know that simple language and ideas are easier to understand than complex ones. “Clear speaking is not an alternative to intelligent discourse, but rather an enabler of intelligent discourse” (Carlson, 2005, p. 79). Did you know that Lincoln’s Gettysburg address contains only 271 words, and

251 of these words only have one or two syllables (Hughes & Phillips, 2000)? Another benefit of using simple language is that you are less likely to trip over or mispronounce simple words. Instead of “protracted,” say “drawn out.” Instead of “conundrum,” say “puzzle.” And instead of “loquacious,” say “talkative. As you are writing your speech you also want to avoid technical jargon, slang, clichés, and euphemisms. This type of language is difficult to understand and tends to be low impact. Compare the *Low Impact* language column with the *High Impact* column in Table 16.3 above to see examples of ways to make your language more powerful.

Avoid Information Overload

No one is given an unlimited amount of time to speak. You can’t cover everything that there is to know about your topic. And even if you could speak forever about everything there was to know about a subject, your listeners would never be able to take it all in. **Information overload** occurs when a person feels that they are faced with an overwhelming amount of information, with the effect that they are unable to process it all or unable to make decision. So whether you have five minutes to give a presentation or three eight hour days, you will need to narrow and focus your speech topic and objectives. If you know that you have ten minutes to speak, you will not be able to cover “Car Maintenance for Dummies,” but you probably could give a good speech entitled “How to Change the Oil in Your Car.” When planning your speech, be sure to determine the amount of information that can reasonably be covered in the time allowed. In fact, rather than taking the entire allotted speaking time, you should get into the practice of speaking only for 90 – 95% of the time that you are given (Reynolds, 2008). More is not always better --- and your audience will appreciate it if you can skillfully make your point with time to spare.

Today knowledge has power. It controls access to opportunity and advancement. ~Peter Drucker



Figure 13.4.2 Kids in Leaves

Make Your Speech Memorable

Build in Repetition

Audience retention is determined by a number of factors including listeners' interest, knowledge, physical and emotional state, level of stress, background, and other competing demands (Fujishin, 2000). One way to help your audience remember the content of your speech is by repetition (Hughes & Phillips, 2000). There are three ways to incorporate repetition into your speech. The first form repetition involves restating your main points in your introduction, body and conclusion. When you do this, you will restate your points using different language --- not repeat the points word for word. The second form of repetition is where a word or a phrase is repeated in a poetic way, either throughout the speech or at a critical point in the speech. One example of this would be Abraham Lincoln's "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Another example can be found in Sojourner Truth's speech, delivered in 1851 at a women's rights convention.

... That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

The final way to use repetition in your speech is through nonverbal communication. When you say the word "four" and you hold up four fingers, or when you verbally agree with a point and nod your head at the same time, you are reinforcing the idea verbally and nonverbally.

Use Visuals

Thinking back to the chapter on visual aids. We know that visual aids can be a very powerful and efficient way to present facts that might otherwise be difficult to convey verbally. The benefits of visuals used for informative speeches include increasing interest, understanding, retention, and the speed at which your audience can understand complex facts. We live in a mediated culture, where people are visually oriented. This means that they expect to be visually stimulated with pictures, graphs, maps, video images and objects. Speakers who do not make use of visuals may be at a disadvantage when compared to speakers who use them. This is assuming of course that the visuals enhance what you are saying and that you use them well. As you know, plenty of people use Power Point, and it does not necessarily make their speech better or more memorable.



Figure 13.4.3 Miss Piggy Speech

Perhaps the best reason to use visuals aids during an informative speech is to help your audience understand a concept that may be difficult to understand just by explaining it. In a speech about heart bypass surgery, would it be better to verbally describe the parts of the human heart, or to show a picture of it? How about a model of the heart? How about an actual human heart? Be sure to consider your audience! What if your speech is about an abstract concept that does not lend itself well to slick graphic representations? One way trainers get their audiences involved and make their presentations memorable is to provide handouts which the listeners complete (in part) themselves. You could use fill-in-the blank statements (where you provide the answer), open-ended questions where listeners can write their thoughts, and activities like matching or crossword puzzles. Regardless of the type of visual media you select for your speech, just make sure that it does not overpower you or the subject. Work to keep the audience's attention on you and what you are saying, and use the visual to complement what *you* have to say.

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14: PERSUASIVE SPEAKING

14.1: What is Persuasive Speaking?
14.2: Approaching Audiences
14.3: Functions and Types of Persuasive Speeches
14.4: Persuasive Strategies
14.5: Persuasive Speech Organization

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14.1: What is Persuasive Speaking?

Learning Objectives

- Explain what a persuasion is.
- Understand why persuasion is an important concept.

At the gas pump, on eggs in the grocery store, in the examination room of your doctor's office, everywhere you go, advertisers are trying to persuade you to buy their product. This form of persuasion used to be reserved for magazines and television commercials, but now it is unavoidable. One marketing research firm estimates that a person living in a large city today sees approximately 5,000 ads per day (Story, 2007). It is easy to assume that our over-exposure to persuasion makes us immune to its effect, but research demonstrates that we are more susceptible than ever. In fact, advertisers have gotten even better at learning exactly the right times and places to reach us by studying different audiences and techniques (Aral & Walker, 2012; Blackman, 2009; Rosendaal, Lapierre, van Reijmersdal, & Buijzen, 2011).

Understanding Persuasion

We also encounter persuasion in our daily interactions. Imagine you stop at a café on your way to school, and the barista persuades you to try something new. While enjoying your espresso, a sales person attempts to persuade you to upgrade your home Internet package. Later, while walking across campus, you observe students who are enthusiastically inviting others to join their organizations. Within thirty minutes, you have encountered at least three instances of persuasion, and there were likely others emanating in the background unbeknownst to you. Amidst being persuaded, you were also actively persuading others. You may have tried to convince the Internet sales person to give you a better deal and an extended contract, and later persuaded a group of friends to enjoy a night on the town. Persuasion is everywhere.

You are used to experiencing persuasion in many forms, and may have an easy time identifying examples of **persuasion**, but can you explain how persuasion works? Osborn and Osborn (1997) define persuasion this way: "the art of convincing others to give favorable attention to our point of view" (p. 415). There are two components that make this definition a useful one. First, it acknowledges the artfulness, or skill, required to persuade others. Whether you are challenged with convincing an auditorium of 500 that they should sell their cars and opt for a pedestrian lifestyle or with convincing your friends to eat pizza instead of hamburgers, persuasion does not normally just happen. Rather it is planned and executed in a thoughtful manner. Second, this definition delineates the ends of persuasion—to convince others to think favorably of our point of view. Persuasion "encompasses a wide range of communication activities, including advertising, marketing, sales, political campaigns, and interpersonal relations" (German, Gronbeck, Ehninger, & Monroe, 2004, p. 242). Because of its widespread utility, persuasion is a pervasive part of our everyday lives.



Figure 14.1.1 Activist

Although persuasion occurs in nearly every facet of our day-to-day lives, there are occasions when more formal acts of persuasion—persuasive speeches—are appropriate. Persuasive speeches "intend to influence the beliefs, attitudes, values, and acts of others" (O'Hair & Stewart, 1999, p. 337). Unlike an informative speech, where the speaker is charged with making some information known to an audience, in a persuasive speech the speaker attempts to influence people to think or behave in a particular way. ***This art of convincing others is propelled by reasoned argument, the cornerstone of persuasive speeches.*** Reasoned arguments, which might consist of facts, statistics, personal testimonies, or narratives, are employed to motivate audiences to think or behave differently than before they heard the speech.

There are particular circumstances that warrant a persuasive approach. As O'Hair and Stewart point out, it makes sense to engage strategies of persuasion when your end goal is to influence any of these things—"beliefs, attitudes, values, and acts"—or to reinforce something that already exists. For instance, safe sex advocates often present messages of reinforcement to already safe sexual actors, reminding them that wearing condoms and asking for consent are solid practices with desirable outcomes. By the same token, safer sex advocates also routinely spread the message to populations who might be likely to engage in unsafe or nonconsensual sexual behavior.

> In a nutshell, persuasive speeches must confront the complex challenge of influencing or reinforcing peoples' beliefs, attitudes, values, or actions, all characteristics that may seem natural, ingrained, or unchangeable to an audience. Because of this, rhetors (or speakers) must motivate their audiences to think or behave differently by presenting reasoned arguments.

> The triumph of persuasion over force is the sign of a civilized society. ~ Mark Skousen

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14.2: Approaching Audiences

Learning Objectives

- Understand how to approach different audiences when delivering a persuasive speech

When choosing a topic for your persuasive speech, it is crucial to consider the composition of your audience. Because persuasive speeches are intended to influence or reinforce an audience's thoughts or behaviors, speakers must consider what and how the audience thinks, feels, and does. Your audience might be ambivalent about your topic, or they may be strongly opposed, in strong agreement, or somewhere along the spectrum. In persuasive speeches, it matters where they fall on this continuum. For instance, if you want to argue that abortion should be illegal and your audience is composed of pro-life advocates, your speech might seem like you are preaching to the choir. But if your audience is made up of staunch pro-choice activists, your speech would be raising a significant objection to a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and actions the audience was already committed to. Decaro, Adams and Jefferis offer advice for carrying out a thorough audience analysis in Chapter 5 of this book. Some questions you might ask before giving a speech include, "Who is hosting the speech?" Often this can provide a great deal of information about who will be in the audience. Audience members at a National Rifle Association gathering probably do not need to be convinced that the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution— the right to keep and bear arms—is worth upholding. You should also ask, "Is the audience fairly heterogeneous?" In a public speaking class, you may be able to gauge that through your interactions with your fellow classmates before you make your way to the podium; but in other settings this may not be the case. If an organization is sponsoring or has invited you to speak, this is a question that can be directed to organizational staff with access to demographic information. Some demographics that may be useful as you craft your speech include age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or cultural background, socioeconomic status, religion, and political affiliation. Each of these characteristics is known to influence a listener's beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions.



Figure 14.2.1 Cheering Crowd

Receptive Audiences

Persuasive speakers will not generally address an audience that already fully agrees with them and is behaving in the way they would like, because that audience no longer needs to be persuaded. However, you may find yourself in situations that allow you to appeal to a **receptive audience** which already knows something about your topic and is generally supportive of, or open to, the point you are trying to make. For example, parents are generally interested in keeping their children safe. If you seek to persuade them that they should work with their kids to prevent them from being taken advantage of on social networking sites, they are

likely to welcome what you have to say. Although they are already convinced that it is important to keep their children safe, this audience may not yet be persuaded that they have the need or ability to keep their kids safe in an online environment. In order to persuade this receptive audience, you should first attempt to foster **identification** with them by highlighting things you have in common. If you are a parent you might say something like, “I have two children and one of my biggest concerns is making sure they are safe.” If you are not a parent you might say, “one of the things I appreciate most about my parents is that I know they are always trying to keep me safe.” With these statements, you not only relate to the audience, but also demonstrate that you share a common concern.



Figure 14.2.2 Kids

Next, offer a clear statement of purpose and tell the audience what you would like them to do in response to your message. If the audience is already likely to agree with your point, they will be looking for ways to act on it. Offer practical steps that they can take. Even if the steps must be carried out later (i.e. the parents in our example may have to wait to get home and start talking with their child about social networking habits), give them a way to respond to the message immediately and show their support. In this case you may have them write down the first thing they will say to their child, or practice saying it to the person next to them. Having them act on your message before leaving reinforces their already favorable response to what you are asking (Beebe & Beebe, 2003).

Neutral Audiences

Most of the groups that a persuasive speaker addresses are neutral audiences. These audiences are not passionate about the topic or speaker, often because they do not have enough information or because they are not aware that they should be concerned. Beebe & Beebe (2003) explain that the challenge in addressing a neutral audience is to foster their interest in your proposition. They offer a few tips for cultivating interest in a neutral audience. Begin by gaining their attention. To do this you might offer a story or statistic that relates the topic directly to the dominant demographic in the audience. If you are trying to convince first-year college students to avoid credit card solicitors on campus you might start with something like, “I know those t-shirts the credit card vendors are handing out are stylish and, best of all, free! But that t-shirt could cost you thousands of dollars before you even graduate.” Rather than beginning with a diatribe on the evils of debt, which many of them may not yet have experienced, you relate to their desire for a free t-shirt and a common belief they are likely to share, that “free” should not translate to “expensive.” If you cannot relate the topic directly to the audience, another approach is to relate the topic to someone they care about, like a family member or friend. Keep in mind that, while the receptive audience may be eager to respond immediately, the neutral audience may simply be more concerned about the topic or more inclined to consider the behavior change you are advocating (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). In this case, consider offering resources for more information, or a few minor steps they can take when they are ready.

Hostile Audiences

Unfortunately, some audiences may be resistant or even hostile to your persuasive speech. A hostile audiencemay take issue with your topic or with you as a speaker. In this case, your primary goal is to persuade the audience to listen to what you have to say (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Once they are willing to listen, then you will have the ability to change their minds in the future. Later in this chapter we will address ways that you can foster a better relationship with the audience by building your ethos. However, if the audience is opposed to your proposition, there are a few steps that you can take to encourage them to at least hear you out. If the audience is not likely to agree with your proposition, wait until later in the speech to offer it. Opening with a clear statement of purpose, which a receptive audience welcomes, will make an unreceptive audience more hostile to your goals. For example, if you begin by telling business owners that you think they should pay workers more, they are likely to think of all the reasons that will threaten their livelihood rather than listening to your message. Instead, begin by highlighting issues on which you agree. You might open with a discussion of the challenges businesses face in attempting to retain quality workers and increase productivity.

I have spent many years of my life in opposition, and I rather like the role. ~ Eleanor Roosevelt

Once you have identified areas of agreement, you can offer your proposition as a way of addressing your shared goals. To promote an increase in wages, you might explain that a study of more than 10,000 workers and managers in a variety of industries demonstrated that companies who pay their workers more were also more motivated to invest in new technology, enhance their management techniques, better train workers, and better deliver their services, all of which lead to higher productivity and increased profits (Applebaum & Bernhardt, 2004). Focusing on areas of agreement will make the audience more receptive to your proposition, but they will still hold some reservations. Acknowledge those reservations and demonstrate that you have given them ample consideration. Cite credible evidence that supports your proposition in light of those reservations. Showing that you understand and respect their opposing position is the most important step toward encouraging a hostile audience to at least hear you out.

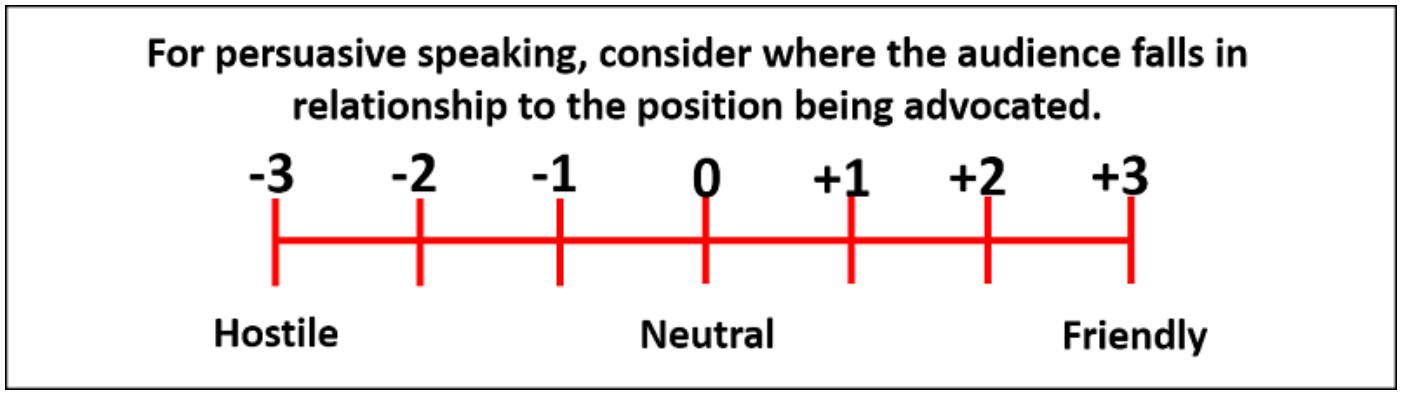


Figure 14.2.3 Persuasive Audience Interest

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14.3: Functions and Types of Persuasive Speeches

Learning Objectives

- Explore the types of persuasive speeches

Persuasive speeches revolve around propositions that can be defended through the use of data and reasoning. Persuasive propositions respond to one of three types of questions: questions of fact, questions of value, and questions of policy. These questions can help the speaker determine what forms of argument and reasoning are necessary to support a specific purpose statement.

Types of Persuasive Speeches

Propositions of Fact

Questions of fact ask whether something "can potentially be verified as either true or false" (Herrick, 2011, p. 20). These questions can seem very straightforward—something is or it is not—but in reality, the search for truth is a complex endeavor. Questions of fact rarely address simple issues such as, "is the sky blue?" They tend to deal with deep-seated controversies such as the existence of global warming, the cause of a major disaster, or someone's guilt or innocence in a court of law. To answer these questions, a proposition of fact may focus on whether or not something exists. For example, in the U.S. there is a debate over the prevalence of racial profiling, the practice of law enforcement officers targeting people for investigation and arrest based on skin color. On one hand, the American Civil Liberties Union advances the proposition: "Racial profiling continues to be a prevalent and egregious form of discrimination in the United States" (ACLU, 2012, para. 2). They verify this claim using data from government studies, crime statistics, and personal narratives. However, journalist Heather MacDonald (2002) proposes that studies confirming racial profiling are often based in "junk science"; in fact she says, "there's no credible evidence that racial profiling exists" (para. 1). To substantiate her proposition, MacDonald relies on a study of traffic stops on the New Jersey turnpike along with personal narratives, policy analysis, and testimony from a criminologist. The claim that racial profiling exists is either true or false, but there is evidence for and against both propositions; therefore no consensus exists.

While some propositions of fact deal with the existence of a particular phenomenon or the accuracy of a theory, others focus on causality. For example, the U.S. government appointed a commission to evaluate the causes of the nation's recent economic crisis. In their report the commission concluded by proposing that recklessness in the financial industry and failures on the part of government regulators caused the economic crisis. However, Congressman Paul Ryan has proposed that Medicare is to blame, and the chief investment officer at JP Morgan has proposed that U.S. housing policy is the root cause of the problem (Angelides, 2011). Each of these three propositions of fact is backed by its own set of historical and economic analysis.



Figure 14.3.1 Traffic Lanes

Propositions of fact may also be used to make predictions concerning what will happen in the future. In the summer of 2011, ten miles of a popular Southern California freeway were closed for an entire weekend. Motorists, news outlets, and government officials called the closure “Carmageddon” because they proposed there would be an “inevitable and likely epic traffic tie-up” (Kandel, 2011, para. 1). As a result of the predictions motorists stayed off the roads and made alternative plans that weekend resulting in much lighter traffic than expected. The proposition may have been true, but the prediction was not fulfilled because people were persuaded to stay off the freeway.

When advancing propositions of fact, you should focus on the evidence you can offer in support of your proposition. First, make sure that your speech contains sufficient evidence to back up your proposition. Next, take the time to interpret that evidence so that it makes sense to your audience. Last, emphasize the relationship between your evidence and your proposition as well as its relevance to the audience (Herrick, 2011).

Propositions of Value

Persuasive speakers may also be called to address questions of value, which call for a proposition judging the (relative) worth of something. These propositions make an evaluative claim regarding morality, aesthetics, wisdom, or desirability. For example, some vegetarians propose that eating meat is immoral because of the way that animals are slaughtered. Vegetarians may base this claim in a philosophy of utilitarianism or animal rights (DeGrazia, 2009).

Sometimes a proposition of value compares multiple options to determine which is best. Consumers call for these comparisons regularly to determine which products to buy. Car buyers may look to the most recent Car and Driver “10 Best Cars” list to determine their next purchase. In labeling a car one of the best on the market for a given year Car and Driver (2011) says that the cars “don’t have to be the newest, and they don’t have to be expensive . . . They just have to meet our abundant needs while satisfying our every want” (para. 1).

Both the vegetarian and car examples offer standards for evaluating the proposition. Since propositions of value tend to be more subjective, speakers need to establish evaluation criteria by which the audience can judge and choose to align with their position. When advancing a proposition of value, offer a clear set of criteria, offer evidence for your evaluation, and apply the evidence to demonstrate that you have satisfied the evaluation criteria (Herrick, 2011).

The 2005 disagreement between family members over removing a woman’s feeding tube after she had been in a coma for 15 years sparked a national debate over the value of life that highlights the importance of evaluation criteria. After years of failed medical treatments and rehabilitation attempts, Terri Schiavo’s husband petitioned the court to remove her feeding tube, initiating a legal battle with her parents that went all the way to the President of the United States (Cerminara & Goodman, 2012). Opposing sides in the debate both claimed to value life. To support his proposition that his wife had a right to die, Mr. Schaivo

applied the evaluation criteria of quality of life and argued that she would not want to continue to live in a vegetative state (Caplan, 2005). Ms. Schiavo's parents vehemently disagreed with his argument. They also claimed to value life and, with the support of religious groups, relied on the evaluation criteria of the sanctity of life to contend that she should be kept alive (Catholic Culture, 2005). Both sides gained widespread support based on people's agreement or disagreement with their evaluation criteria. Despite intervention on behalf of both state and federal legislators, the courts eventually ruled that Mr. Schiavo had the right to have his wife's feeding tube removed and allow her to die.

Propositions of Policy

Although the Schiavo case was rooted in a question of value, the debate resulted in a question of policy. **Questions of policy ask the speaker to advocate for an appropriate course of action.** This form of persuasive speech is used every day in Congress to determine laws, but it is also used interpersonally to determine how we ought to behave. A proposition of policy may call for people to stop a particular behavior, or to start one. For example, some U.S. cities have started banning single use plastic bags in grocery stores. Long before official public policy on this issue was established, organizations such as The Surfrider Foundation and the Earth Resource Foundation advocated that people stop using these bags because of the damage plastic bags cause to marine life. In this case local governments and private organizations attempted to persuade people to stop engaging in a damaging behavior— shopping with single use plastic bags. However, the organizations also attempted to persuade people to start a new behavior—shopping with reusable bags.

When answering a question of policy, speakers will typically begin by describing the status quo. If you are arguing that a change must be made, you must first identify the problem inherent in the current behavior, and then demonstrate that the problem is significant enough to warrant immediate consideration. Once you have established that there is a problem which the audience ought to consider, you can then offer your proposal for a preferable course of action (Herrick, 2011). Then, it is up to you to demonstrate that your proposed policy will have more benefits than costs.



Figure 14.3.2 Post Office Boxes

In 2011 the U.S. Postal Service, the nation's second-largest employer, told Congress it was facing an $8.3 billion budget shortfall (Bingham, 2011). To solve the problem, the Postal Service proposed that be permitted to end Saturday mail delivery and close some post offices. To make their argument, they first described the status quo saying that the demand for their service had dramatically decreased with the popularity of email and online bill-pay services. They explained that in preceding years they laid off workers and cut spending to help with the shortfall of revenue, but now another plan was necessary to avoid defaulting on their financial obligations. They offered evidence that people preferred ending Saturday mail to alternatives such as paying more for stamps or allocating more tax money to post offices (Bingham, 2011). Although they made a compelling case, the USPS still needed to overcome perceived disadvantages to their proposition such as the negative impact on businesses and rural towns (Bingham, 2011; Stephenson, 2012). A full year later, the policy proposition passed the U.S. Senate but continues to await approval in the House (Stephenson, 2012).

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14.4: Persuasive Strategies

Learning Objectives

- Understand ethos, logos, and pathos as persuasive strategies
- Look at ways to build an argument
- Explore some logical fallacies and how to avoid using them

In persuasive speaking, effective arguments rely not only on strong evidence but also on how that evidence is presented. Aristotle identified three key persuasive strategies—**ethos**, or the credibility of the speaker; **logos**, the logical reasoning behind the message; and **pathos**, the emotional appeal to the audience. Together, these strategies help speakers build trust, present sound arguments, and connect with listeners on a deeper level.

Ethos

In addition to understanding how your audience feels about the topic you are addressing, you will need to take steps to help them see you as credible and interesting. The audience's perception of you as a speaker is influential in determining whether or not they will choose to accept your proposition. Aristotle called this element of the speech **ethos**, "a Greek word that is closely related to our terms ethical and ethnic" (Campbell & Huxman, 2009, p. 232). He taught speakers to establish credibility with the audience by appearing to have good moral character, common sense, and concern for the audience's well-being (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Campbell & Huxman (2009) explain that ethos is not about conveying that you, as an individual, are a good person. It is about "mirror[ing] the characteristics idealized by [the] culture or group" (ethnic) (p.232), and demonstrating that you make good moral choices with regard to your relationship within the group (ethics).



Figure 14.4.1 Protester

While there are many things speakers can do to build their ethos throughout the speech, "assessments of ethos often reflect superficial first impressions," and these first impressions linger long after the speech has concluded (Zarefsky, 2005, p.14). This means that what you wear and how you behave, even before opening your mouth, can go far in shaping your ethos. Be sure to dress appropriately for the occasion and setting in which you speak. Also work to appear confident, but not arrogant, and be sure to maintain enthusiasm about your topic throughout the speech. Give great attention to the crafting of your opening sentences because they will set the tone for what your audience should expect of your personality as you proceed.

Logos

Another way to enhance your ethos, and your chances of persuading the audience, is to use sound arguments. In a persuasive speech, the **argument** will focus on the reasons for supporting your specific purpose statement. This argumentative approach is what Aristotle referred to as **logos**, or the logical means of proving an argument (Braet, 1992).

When offering an argument you begin by making an assertion that requires a logical leap based on the available evidence (Campbell & Huxman, 2009). One of the most popular ways of understanding how this process works was developed by British philosopher Stephen Toulmin (Herrick, 2011). Toulmin explained that basic arguments tend to share three common elements: claim, data, and warrant. The **claim** is an assertion that you want the audience to accept. **Data** refers to the preliminary evidence on which the claim is based. For example, if I saw large gray clouds in the sky, I might make the claim that "it is going to rain today." The gray clouds (data) are linked to rain (claim) by the **warrant**, an often unstated general connection, that large gray clouds tend to produce rain. The warrant is a connector that, if stated, would likely begin with "since" or "because." In our rain example, if we explicitly stated all three elements, the argument would go something like this: There are large gray clouds in the sky today (data). Since large gray clouds tend to produce rain (warrant), it is going to rain today (claim). However, in our regular encounters with argumentation, we tend to only offer the claim and (occasionally) the warrant.

To strengthen the basic argument, you will need **backing** for the claim. Backing provides foundational support for the claim (Herrick, 2011) by offering examples, statistics, testimony, or other information which further substantiates the argument. To substantiate the rain argument we have

just considered, you could explain that the color of a cloud is determined by how much light the water in the cloud is reflecting. A thin cloud has tiny drops of water and ice crystals which scatter light, making it appear white. Clouds appear gray when they are filled with large water droplets which are less able to reflect light (Brill, 2003).

Table 14.4.1 The Toulmin Model Basic Argument

Basic Argument	
Data I had a hard time finding a place to park on campus today.	**Claim** The school needs more parking spaces.
Warrant If I can't find a place to park, there must be a shortage of spaces.	
Argument With Backing	
Data Obesity is a serious problem in the U.S.	**Claim** U.S. citizens should be encouraged to eat less processed foods.
Warrant Processed foods contribute to obesity more than natural, or unprocessed, foods.	

Table 14.4.1 The Toulmin Model Basic Argument
Backing
"As a rule processed foods are more 'energy dense' than freshfoods: they contain less water and fiber but more added fat and sugar, which makes them both less filling and more fattening"(Pollan, 2007).

The elements that Toulmin identified (see Table 16.1) may be arranged in a variety of ways to make the most logical argument. As you reason through your argument you may proceed inductively, deductively, or causally, toward your claim. **Inductive reasoning** moves from specific examples to a more general claim. For example, if you read online reviews of a restaurant chain called Walt's Wine & Dine and you noticed that someone reported feeling sick after eating at a Walt's, and another person reported that the Walt's they visited was understaffed, and another commented that the tables in the Walt's they ate at had crumbs left on them, you might conclude (or claim) that the restaurant chain is unsanitary. To test the validity of a general claim, Beebe and Beebe (2003) encourage speakers to consider whether there are "enough specific instances to support the conclusion," whether the specific instances are typical, and whether the instances are recent (p.384).

The opposite of inductive reasoning is **deductive reasoning**, moving from a general principle to a claim regarding a specific instance. In order to move from general to specific we tend to use syllogisms. A syllogism begins with a major (or general) premise, then moves to a minor premise, then concludes with a specific claim. For example, if you know that all dogs bark (major premise), and your neighbor has a dog (minor premise), you could then conclude that your neighbor's dog barks (specific claim). To verify the accuracy of your specific claim, you must verify the truth and applicability of the major premise. What evidence do you have that all dogs bark? Is it possible that only most dogs bark? Next, you must also verify the accuracy of the minor premise. If the major premise is truly generalizable, and both premises are accurate, your specific claim should also be accurate.



Figure 14.4.2 Explosion

Your reasoning may also proceed causally. **Causal reasoning** examines related events to determine which one caused the other. You may begin with a cause and attempt to determine its effect. For example, when the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, scientists explained that because many animals in the Gulf were nesting and reproducing at the time, the spill could wipe out "an entire generation of hundreds of species" (Donovan, 2010, para. 2). Their argument reasoned that the spill (cause) would result in species loss (effect). Two years later, the causal reasoning might be reversed. If we were seeing species loss in the Gulf (effect), we could reason that it was a result of the oil spill (cause). Both of these claims rely on the evidence available at the time. To make the first claim, scientists not only offered evidence that animals were nesting and reproducing, but they also looked at the effects of an oil spill that occurred 21 years earlier in Alaska (Donovan, 2010). To make the second claim, scientists could examine dead animals washing up on the coast to determine whether their deaths were caused by oil.

Pathos

While we have focused heavily on logical reasoning, we must also recognize the strong role that emotions play in the persuasive process. Aristotle called this element of the speech **pathos**. Pathos draws on the emotions, sympathies, and prejudices of the audience to appeal to their non-rational side (Beebe & Beebe 2003; Reike, Sillars, & Peterson, 2009). Human beings are constantly in some emotional state, which means that tapping into an audience's emotions can be vital to persuading them to accept your proposition (Dillard & Meijnders, 2002).

One of the most helpful strategies in appealing to your audience's emotions is to use clear examples that illustrate your point. Illustrations can be crafted verbally, nonverbally, or visually. To offer a verbal illustration, you could tell a compelling story. For example, when fundraising for breast cancer research, Nancy Brinker, creator of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, has plenty of compelling statistics and examples to offer. Yet, she regularly talks about her sister, explaining: *Susan G. Komen fought breast cancer with her heart, body and soul. Throughout her diagnosis, treatments, and endless days in the hospital, she spent her time thinking of ways to make life better for other women battling breast cancer instead of worrying about her own situation. That concern for others continued even as Susan neared the end of her fight (Komen National, n.d.).* Brinker promised her sister that she would continue her fight against breast cancer. This story compels donors to join her fight.

Speakers can also tap into emotions using nonverbal behaviors to model the desired emotion for their audience. In the summer of 2012, the U.S. House of Representatives debated holding the Attorney General in contempt for refusing to release documents concerning a controversial gun-tracking operation. Arguing for a contempt vote, South Carolina Representative Trey Gowdy did not simply state his claim, instead he raised his voice, slowed his pace, and used hand motions to convey anger with what he perceived as deception on the part of the Attorney General (Gowdy, 2012). His use of volume, tone, pace, and hand gestures enhanced the message and built anger in his audience.

Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. It is to bring another out of his bad sense into your good sense ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

In addition to verbal and nonverbal illustrations, **visual imagery** can enhance the emotional appeal of a message. For example, we have all heard about the dangers of drugs, and there are multiple campaigns that attempt to prevent people from even trying them. However, many young adults experiment with drugs under the assumption that they are immune from the negative effects if they only use the drug recreationally. To counter this assumption regarding methamphetamines, the Montana Meth project combines controversial statements with graphic images on billboards to evoke fear of the drug (see www.methproject. org /ads/ print/ for some disturbing examples). Young adults may have heard repeated warnings that meth is addictive and that it has the potential to cause sores, rotten teeth, and extreme weight loss, but Montana Meth Project's visual display is more compelling because it turns the audience's stomach, making the message memorable. This image, combined with the slogan, "not even once," conveys the persuasive point without the need for other forms of evidence and rational argument.

Appeals to fear, like those in the Montana Meth Project ads, have proven effective in motivating people to change a variety of behaviors. However, speakers must be careful with their use of this emotion. Fear appeals tend to be more effective when they appeal to a high-level fear, such as death, and they are more effective when offered by speakers with a high level of perceived credibility (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Fear appeals are also more persuasive when the speaker can convince the audience they have the ability to avert the threat. If audiences doubt their ability to avoid or minimize the threat, the appeal may backfire (Witte & Allen, 2000).

In addition to considering their topic and persuasive strategy, speakers must take care to ensure that their message is ethical. Persuasion is often confused with another kind of communication that has similar ends, but different methods—coercion. Like persuasion, **coercion** is a process whereby thoughts or behaviors are altered. But in coercive acts, deceptive or harmful methods propel the intended changes, not reason. Strong and Cook (1992) contrasted the two: "persuasion uses argument to compel power to give way to reason while coercion uses force to compel reason to give way to power" (p. 7). The "force" that Strong and Cook mention frequently manifests as promises for reward or punishment, but sometimes it arises as physical or emotional harm. Think of almost any international crime film you have seen, and you are likely to remember a scene where someone was compelled to out their compatriots by way of force. Jack Bauer, the protagonist in the American television series 24, became an infamous character by doing whatever it took to get captured criminals to talk. Although dramatic as an example, those scenes where someone is tortured in an effort to produce evidence offer a familiar reference when thinking about coercion. To avoid coercing an audience, speakers should use logical and emotional appeals responsibly.

Logical Fallacies

Persuasive speakers must be careful to avoid using **fallacies** in their reasoning. Fallacies are errors in reasoning that occur when a speaker fails to use appropriate or applicable evidence for their argument. There are a wide variety of fallacies, and it is not possible to list them all here. However,

speakers should watch for four common categories of fallacies: “fallacies of faulty assumption,” which occur when the speaker reasons based on a problematic assumption; “fallacies directed to the person,” which occur when the speaker focuses on the attributes of an individual opponent rather than the relevant arguments; “fallacies of case presentation,” which occur when the speaker mischaracterizes the issue; and “fallacies of suggestion,” which occur when the speaker implies or suggests an argument without fully developing it (Herrick, 2011, p. 256). See the Table 16.2 on the following page for examples of each of these types of fallacies. To learn more about fallacies, see Chapter 6 by Russ (Critical Thinking and Reasoning), or see the supplemental handout found on the Persuasive Speaking chapter homepage (www.publicspeaking project.org/persuasive.html)



Figure 14.4.3 Campus Speaker

There are some positive steps you can take to avoid these pitfalls of persuasive speaking and ensure that you are presenting your message in the most ethical manner. We have already discussed some of these, such as offering credible evidence for your arguments and showing concern for the audience’s well being. However, you should also offer a transparent goal for your speech. Even with a hostile audience, where you may wait until later in the speech to provide the specific purpose statement, you should be forthcoming about your specific purpose. In fact, be truthful with your audience throughout the speech.

Table 14.4.2 Examples of Fallacies

Fallacies of Faulty Assumption	
Causal Fallacy	It is cloudy outside, and I feel sick. Cloudy days make me sick. The school board voted to buy new picnic tables for the lunch room. Many students were out sick the following day. The students must be upset about the picnic tables.

Table 14.4.2 Examples of Fallacies	
Fallacies of Faulty Assumption	
Bandwagon Fallacy	Everyone takes out a loan to buy a car, so you should too. None of the cool kids wear helmets when they ride bikes. You should take yours off.
Begging the Question	Lion King is an excellent film because it has excellent animation. Marijuana is good for you because it is natural.
Appeal to Tradition	We should keep this law because it's been around for hundreds of years. This is the way we've always taught math, so it must be the best method.
Fallacies Directed to the Person	
Ad Hominem	We should reject President Obama's health care legislation because it is socialism. We should ignore Donald Trump's opposition to tax hikes because he's just rich and selfish.
Poisoning the Well	Before the defense makes their closing statement, keep in mind that their client has not said one truthful word throughout the trial. My opponent is going to try to manipulate you into thinking her plan is better for the city.
Appeal to Flattery	First, I wanted to tell you that this is my favorite class. I tell all my friends how much I love it. I just think I deserve a better grade on my exam. You are such a generous person, I know you'll want to donate to this cause.
Fallacies of Case Presentation	
Non Sequitur	I don't plan to vote today because I am moving next week. You should clean your room because I am going to do the laundry.
Red Herring	I should not be fined for parking in a red zone when there are so many people out there committing real crimes like robbery and murder. War is wrong, but in times of crisis we should support the president.

Table 14.4.2 Examples of Fallacies	
Fallacies of Faulty Assumption	
Appeal to Misplaced Authority	This diet is the best one for people with my health condition, Oprah said so. I want to visit the Museum of Modern Art. My English professor says they have the best collection anywhere!
Fallacies of Suggestion	
Paralepsis	I'm not saying he cheated; he just did uncharacteristically well on that exam. If she wants to work for a crook, that's her business.
Either-Or	Either you're with us or against us. Love it or leave it.
Arrangement	I have so much to do today. I have to get my car fixed, finish a paper, take a nap, and pick my mom up from the airport. So many highly respected musicians will be there: Paul McCartney, Elton John, LMFAO, Billy Joel . . .

It is appropriate to use fictional scenarios to demonstrate your point, but tell the audience that is what you are doing. You can accomplish this by introducing fictional examples with the phrase, "hypothetically," or "imagine," to signal that you are making it up (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Additionally, be sure to offer a mix of logical and emotional appeals. Blending these strategies insures that you have evidence to back up emotional claims, and that you are sensitive to the audiences' emotional reactions to your logical claims. Attending to both aspects will help you be more ethical and more persuasive.

The most important persuasion tool you have in your entire arsenal is integrity. ~ Zig Ziglar

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14.5: Persuasive Speech Organization

Learning Objectives

- Examine different persuasive speech organizational patterns

Once you have selected your topic, know who your audience is, and have settled on an end goal for your persuasive speech, you can begin drafting your speech. Outlines are organized according to the particular speech, and the following organizational patterns are used routinely for persuasive speeches.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence

Monroe's Motivated Sequence is an organizational pattern that attempts to convince the audience to respond to a need that is delineated in the speech (Monroe, 1949). Five separate steps characterize the Motivated Sequence organization style:

1. The **attention** step should get the audience's attention as well as describe your goals and preview the speech.
2. The **need** step should provide a description of the problem as well as the consequences that may result if the problem goes unresolved. In this step, the speaker should also alert audience members to their role in mitigating the issue.
3. The **satisfaction** step is used to outline your solutions to the problems you have previously outlined as well as deal with any objections that may arise.
4. In the **visualization** step, audience members are asked to visualize what will happen if your solutions are implemented and what will happen if they do not come to fruition. Visualizations should be rich with detail.
5. The **action** appeal step should be used to make a direct appeal for action. In this step, you should describe precisely how the audience should react to your speech and how they should carry out these actions. As the final step, you should also offer a concluding comment. See Figure 14.5.1 to see this method of arrangement illustrated.

Proposition: You (the audience) should volunteer or donate at the Morris County Animal Protection Agency.

I. Attention step
- A. When was the last time you saw a dog chained to a tree in a neighbor's yard, heard about a puppy mill in your town, or went into a pet store only to find dogs and cats for sale?
- B. I work with the Morris County Animal Protection Group and I would like to share some ways in which you can help prevent these travesties.
- C. First, I will describe some of the major problems in Morris County, and then I will tell you how you can get involved.

II. Need step: Many animals in Morris County are abused and neglected.
- A. There are too many stray animals that are neither spayed nor neutered, resulting in an overabundance of cats and dogs.
- B. These animals often cannot find enough food to survive and the local shelter cannot accommodate such high populations.
- C. The cost of local spay/neuter programs is too high for our agency to handle.

III. Satisfaction step: Raising $1 million for the Morris County Animal Protection Agency can effectively solve these problems.
- A. We could afford to spay or neuter most stray animals.
- B. Obtained animals could be fed and accommodated until a home can be secured for them.
- C. Additionally, we could subsidize spay/neuter costs for local citizens.

IV. Visualization step: Imagine what we can do for our animals with this money.
- A. What will it be like if we can carry out these actions?
- B. What will it be like if we cannot do these things?

V. Action appeal step: Donate to the Morris County Animal Protection Agency.
- A. If you want to help protect the many struggling stray animals in Morris County, make a donation to our organization.
- B. Your donation will make a real difference in the lives of our animals.
- C. We cannot effect real change for the animals of our county without each and every one of you.

Figure 14.5.1. Monroe's Motivated Sequence Sample Outline

Direct Method Pattern

If your goal is to convince your audience to adopt a particular idea, you might prefer the direct method pattern as a way of organizing your speech. This pattern consists of a claim and a list of reasons to support it. Every piece of support in the speech directly supports the central claim you wish to make. As Jaffe (2004) points out, "It's a good pattern to use when listeners are

apathetic or neutral, either mildly favoring or mildly opposing your claim" (p. 329). The outline for a speech on vegetarianism in Figure 14.5.2 provides three reasons that vegetarianism provides useful health benefits for people struggling with obesity.

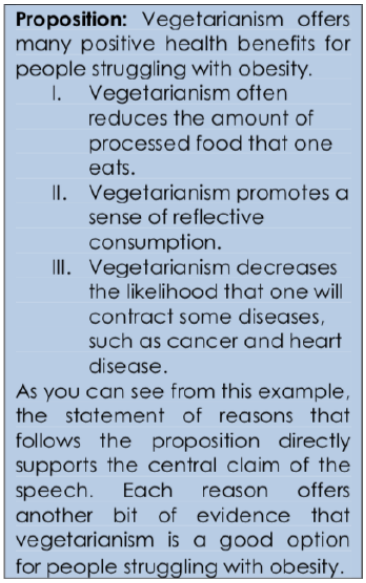


Figure 14.5.2. Direct Method Pattern Sample Outline

History creates comprehensibility primarily by arranging facts meaningfully and only in a very limited sense by establishing strict causal connections. ~ Johan Huizinga

Causal Pattern

Similar to a problem-solution speech, which was covered in Chapter 8, a causal speech describes a general cause and a specific effect. In other words, a **causal pattern** first addresses some cause and then shares what effects resulted. A causal speech can be particularly effective when the speaker wants to convince their audience of the relationship between two things. With sound causal reasoning, a speech of this sort can be used to convince the audience of something they were previously opposed to believing.

As the example in Figure 14.5.3 illustrates, the basic components of the causal speech are the cause and the effect. Such an organizational style is useful when a speaker needs to share the results of a new program, discuss how one act led to another, or discuss the positive/negative outcomes of taking some action. Through this pattern, the speaker can convince audiences to adopt a new belief about a particular phenomenon.

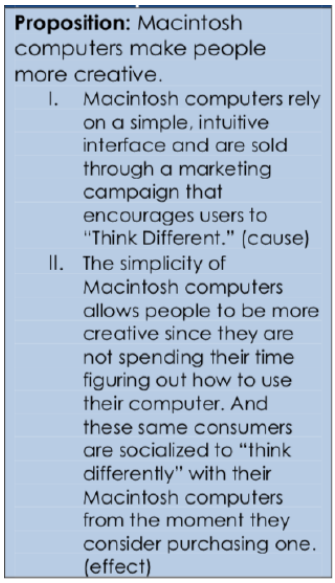


Figure 14.5.3. *Causal Pattern Sample Outline*

Refutation Pattern

Sometimes an occasion will arise when your audience is already opposed to your argument. In this case, a **refutation pattern** can be engaged to persuade audience members that your side of the argument is better or more accurate. In a refutation speech, the speaker must anticipate the audience's opposition, then bring attention to the tensions between the two sides, and finally refute them using evidential support. Refutation patterns are frequently seen in debates, where speakers are fundamentally opposed to one another's arguments. Refutation generally happens through a set of four steps: (1) signaling the argument to which you are responding, (2) stating your own argument, (3) providing justification or evidence for your side of the argument, and (4) summarizing your response. An advocate of reusing as opposed to recycling might present the argument in Figure 16.4 to respond to someone who believes recycling is the best way to individually work on environmental stewardship. As this example illustrates, a refutation speech should clearly delineate where the audience is perceived to stand on an issue, why their view is in disagreement with the speaker's, and why the audience should adopt the speaker's position. Moreover, the speaker should be sure to highlight the importance of the debate, which will clue the audience into why they should spend their time listening to a speaker who clearly disagrees with them. An example of this pattern can be found on the next page in Figure 14.5.4.

Neither irony nor sarcasm is argument. ~ Samuel Butler

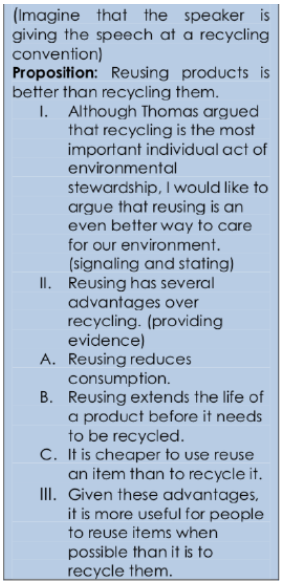


Figure 14.5.4. *Sample Outline Refutation Pattern*

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15: MASS COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND MEDIA LITERACY

15.1: Defining Mass Communication
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0
15.4: Media Literacy

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15.1: Defining Mass Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define mass communication
- Identify key functions of mass communication

Imagine you're in class, scrolling Instagram and listening to music, when the instructor begins speaking. She welcomes everyone, points to the course webpage, and explains that the syllabus will only be available online. Students are expected to read it before the next class. In addition to lectures and discussions, you'll need to follow the news, read assigned articles, and watch videos to understand key concepts. After a quick reminder to silence phones, she assigns the first textbook chapter and explains that the textbook includes a passcode for accessing an online database of articles for your semester project. Once questions are answered, class ends.

As you leave, you hear music from the campus radio station. You grab lunch while watching TV in the student union, then listen to a baseball game on the car radio. Driving home, you notice a billboard ad. Later, at your computer, you check course updates, news, sports scores, and email—deleting spam and annoyed by pop-up ads. Finally, you relax with a movie on Netflix, moving aside a pile of magazines to set down your drink.

This example shows how much mass communication surrounds us daily. In the U.S., much of what we know about the world comes through media. Early 20th-century scholars began asking questions that still matter today: How does mass communication affect us? How do we access and interpret it? Are we active or passive participants? This chapter explores these questions by looking at the evolution, functions, theories, and role of mass communication in society.



Figure 15.1.1 Global Communication Network

Defining Mass Communication

To understand mass communication, one must first be aware of some of the key factors that distinguish it from other forms of communication. First is the dependence on a media channel to convey a message to a large audience. Second, the audience tends to be distant, diverse, and varies in size depending on the medium and message. Third, mass

communication is most often profit driven, and feedback is limited. Fourth, because of the impersonal nature of mass communication, participants are not equally present during the process.

Mass communication continues to become more integrated into our lives at an increasingly rapid pace. This metamorphosis is represented by the convergence occurring (Fidler) between ourselves and technology, where we are not as distanced from mass communication as in the past. Increasingly, we have more opportunities to use mediated communication to fulfill interpersonal and social needs.

Note

O'Sullivan refers to this new use of mass communication to foster our personal lives as mass-personal communication. This is where *(a) traditional mass communication channels are used for interpersonal communication, (b) traditionally interpersonal communication channels are used for mass communication, and (c) traditional mass communication and traditional interpersonal communication occur simultaneously*. Over time, more and more overlap occurs. "Innovations in communication technologies have begun to make the barriers between mass and interpersonal communication theory more permeable than ever" (O'Sullivan). Sites such as Facebook, X (formally known as Twitter), TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram are great examples of new mass communication platforms we use to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships.

As more mass communication mediums develop, Marshall McLuhan states that we can understand media as either hot or cold depending on the amount of information available to the user as well as the degree of participation. A hot medium "extends one single sense in high definition" (McLuhan). Examples of hot media include photographs or radio because the message is mostly interpreted using one sense and requires little participation by participants. An audience is more passive with hot media because there is less to filter. Television is considered a cold medium because it *contains a large amount of multisensory information*.

Perhaps we are turning into a global village through our interdependence with mass communication. Suddenly, *across the ocean* has become *around the corner*. McLuhan predicted this would happen because of *mass communication's ability to unify people around the globe*. Are you a player in what Habermas calls the "public sphere" that mass communication creates by posting information about yourself on public sites? If so, be careful about what you post about yourself or allow others to tag you in, as many employers are Googling potential employees to look into their personal lives before making decisions about hiring them. As we continue our discussion of mass communication, we want to note that mass communication does not include every communication technology. As our definition states, mass communication is communication that potentially reaches large audiences.

Functions of Mass Communication

Mass communication doesn't exist for a single purpose. With its evolution, more and more uses have developed, and the role it plays in our lives has increased greatly. Wright characterizes seven functions of mass communication that offer insight into its role in our lives.

Surveillance

The first function of mass communication is to serve as *the eyes and ears for those seeking information about the world*. The internet, television, and newspapers are the main sources for finding out what's going on around you. Society relies on mass communication for news and information about our daily lives; it reports the weather, current issues, and the latest celebrity gossip and even start times for games. Do you remember the Boston Marathon bombing that happened in 2013? How did you hear about it? Thanks to the internet and smartphones, instant access to information is at the user's fingertips. News apps have made mass communication surveillance instantly accessible by sending notifications to smartphones with the latest news.

Correlation

Correlation *addresses how the media presents facts that we use to move through the world*. The information received through mass communication is not objective and without bias. People ironically state, "It must be true if it's on the internet." However, we don't think that in generations past, people must have without a doubt stated, "It has to be true

because it was on the radio." This statement begs the question, How credible are the media? Can we consume media without questioning motive and agenda? Someone selects, arranges, interprets, edits, and critiques the information used in the media. If you ask anyone who works for a major reality TV show if what we see is a fair representation of what really happens, the person would probably tell you no.

Sensationalization

There is an old saying in the news industry, "If it bleeds, it leads," which highlights the idea of sensationalization, which is *when the media puts forward the most sensational messages to titillate consumers*. Elliot observes, "Media managers think in terms of consumers rather than citizens. Good journalism sells, but unfortunately, bad journalism sells as well. And, bad journalism—stories that simply repeat government claims or that reinforce what the public wants to hear instead of offering independent reporting—is cheaper and easier to produce."

Entertainment

Media outlets such as *People* magazine, TMZ, and entertainment blogs such as Perez Hilton keep us up to date on the daily comings and goings of our favorite celebrities. We use technology to watch sports, go to the movies, play video games, watch YouTube videos, and stream music on a daily basis. Most mass communication simultaneously entertains and informs. We often turn to media during our leisure time to provide *an escape from boredom and relief from the predictability of our everyday lives*. We rely on media to take us places we could not afford to go or imagine, acquaint us with bits of culture, and make us laugh, think, or cry. Entertainment can have *the secondary effect of providing companionship and/or catharsis through the media we consume*.

Transmission

Mass media is *a vehicle to transmit cultural norms, values, rules, and habits*. Consider how you learned about what's fashionable in clothes or music. Mass media plays a significant role in the socialization process. We look for role models to display appropriate cultural norms, but all too often, we do not recognize their inappropriate or stereotypical behavior. Mainstream society starts shopping, dressing, smelling, walking, and talking like the person in the music video, commercial, or movies. Why would soft drink companies pay Kim Kardashian or Taylor Swift millions of dollars to sell their products? Have you ever bought a pair of shoes or changed your hairstyle because of something you encountered in the media? Obviously, culture, age, type of media, and other cultural variables factor into how mass communication influences how we learn and perceive our culture.

Mobilization

Mass communication functions to mobilize people during times of crisis (McQuail). Think back to the Boston Marathon bombing. Regardless of your association to the incident, Americans felt the attack as a nation, and people followed the news until they found the perpetrators. With instant access to media and information, we can collectively witness the same events taking *place in real time somewhere else, thus mobilizing a large population of people around a particular event*. The online community Reddit.com is a key example of the internet's proactivity. While the FBI was investigating the bombing, the Reddit community was posting witness photos and trying to help identify the culprits. People felt they were making a difference.

Validation

Mass communication functions to validate the status and norms of particular individuals, movements, organizations, or products. The validation of particular people or groups serves *to enforce social norms* (Lazarsfeld and Merton). If you think about most television dramas and sitcoms, who are the primary characters? What gender and ethnicity are the majority of the stars? What gender and ethnicity are those that play criminals or those considered abnormal? The media validates particular cultural norms while diminishing differences and variations from those norms. A great deal of criticism focuses on how certain groups are promoted and others marginalized by how they are portrayed in mass media.

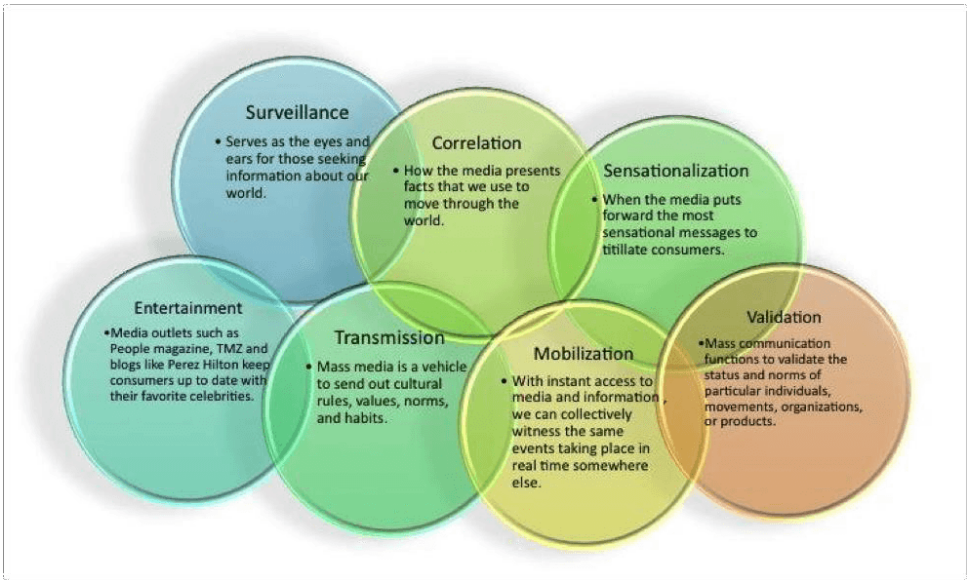


Figure 15.1.2 Functions of media Image Spaynton is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

Given the power of the various functions of mass communication, we need to be reflective about its presence in our lives (McLuhan and Fiore). We will now turn our attention to the study of mass communication by looking at what mass communication scholars study and how they study it.

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15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication

Learning Objectives

- Explore grounding theories of mass communication

Grounding Theories of Mass Communication

Almost forty years ago, Osmo Wiio argued that mass communication does not accurately portray reality. Interesting that all this time later, we now have a large number of reality TV shows that continue to blur the lines of reality and fiction. Are you always able to tell the difference between fiction and reality in mass communication? Most people tend to rationalize that others are more affected by mass communication than they are (Paul et al.). However, we are all susceptible to the influence of mass communication.

Theories are our best representations of the world around us. “Mass communication theories are explanations and predictions of social phenomena that attempt to relate mass communication to various aspects of our personal and cultural lives or social systems” (Baran). We need to be discerning as we examine mass communication (Baran). “The beginning of the television age in the 1950s brought in visual communication as well as stimulated the rise of an interdisciplinary theory of the media. Contributions were made from economics, history, literature, art, political science, psychology, sociology and anthropology, and led to the emergence of academic departments of communication and cultural studies” (Briggs and Burke). Mass communication theories explore explanations for how we interact with mass communication, its role in our lives, and the effects it has on us.

Let’s look at six fundamental theories of mass communication: (1) magic bullet theory, (2) two-step flow theory, (3) multistep flow theory, (4) uses and gratification theory, (5) cultivation theory, and (6) media imperialism.



Figure 15.2.1 Interconnectedness

Magic Bullet Theory

The **magic bullet theory** (also called the hypodermic needle theory) suggests that mass communication is like a gun firing bullets of information at a passive audience. “Communication was seen as a magic bullet that transferred ideas or feelings or knowledge or motivations almost automatically from one mind to another” (Schramm). This theory has been largely discredited by academics because of its suggestion that all members of an audience interpret messages in the same way and are largely passive receptors of messages. This theory does not take into account intervening cultural and demographic variables such as

age, ethnicity, gender, personality, or education that cause us to react differently to the media messages we encounter. However, many people hold the assumption that media, like television news outlets, simply release information that doesn't encourage audience engagement and critical thinking. Rather than give a story with an unbiased message, which would allow a consumer to create an opinion for themselves, media news outlets present stories to audiences that are attractive to them. Those who believe reality television shows actually portray reality hold some assumptions of the magic bullet theory.

Two-Step Flow Theory

After World War II, researchers realized that audiences don't all respond the same way to media. In fact, media often have less direct power than originally believed. The **two-step flow theory** explains this process: media messages rarely move straight from sender to audience. Instead, a small group of **opinion leaders** first consume, interpret, and reshape media content based on their own values and beliefs. They then pass these messages along to their networks—called **opinion followers**—who may have less direct contact with the media. This model is especially clear during elections, when media coverage shapes what voters know about candidates, often through the influence of these gatekeepers.

This theory still applies today. For example, Pope Francis reached millions through X (formerly Twitter), often sparking global discussion. President Obama's social media presence was a major factor in his 2008 campaign, while President Trump's use of Twitter defined much of his political communication. At the same time, debates over "liberal media bias" versus conservative media ownership highlight ongoing struggles over who controls the narrative. What remains consistent is that media become especially influential to politics, when people rely heavily on them for information and cues about how to interpret events.

Multistep Flow Theory

The **multistep flow theory** suggests that there is a reciprocal nature of sharing information and influencing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Troldahl; Troldahl and Van Dam). The idea is that opinion leaders might create media messages, but opinion followers might be able to sway opinion leaders. Thus, the relationship to media becomes much more complex. Some believe that the role of the opinion leader in our changing culture is diminishing (Baran; Kang), particularly with the ability for average people to reach potentially millions of people through social media. You've likely heard the term "going viral," which is something that could not have happened twenty years ago. This mediated diffusion debunks the notion of an all-powerful media but still recognizes that media have some effect on the audience.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The **uses and gratification theory** suggests that audience members actively pursue particular media to satisfy their own needs. "Researchers focus their attention, then, on how audiences use the media rather than how the media affect audiences" (Berger). The reciprocal nature of the mass communication process no longer sees the media user as an inactive, unknowing participant but as an active, sense-making participant who chooses content and makes informed media choices. We tend to avoid media that do not agree with our values, attitudes, beliefs, or pocketbooks. Schramm argued that we make media choices by determining how gratified we will be from consuming a particular media. Is it easier for you to read a newspaper or would you rather watch television or listen to the radio? Even with all the information on the internet, there are still some people who consider it too time consuming and complex. On the other hand, streaming shows online helps us avoid commercials and media content in which we choose not to participate. These newer ways of watching television have allowed the consumer to make active choices about what media they use and consume.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory questions how active we actually are when we consume mass communication. For example, the average American views between 3 and 5 hours of television a day for an average of 21 hours per week (Hinckly). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, by age 18, the average American child will have watched 200,000 acts of violence on television. This statistic does not even take into account the violence a child has access to through social media, music videos, other media distribution, or real life. When violence is shown on television, rarely are the negative consequences of it acknowledged—47% of victims show no evidence of harm, and 73% of perpetrators were not held accountable for their violent actions (Huston et al.).

What kind of impact does all of this have? Is it possible to tell when the average viewer becomes desensitized to violent content, or does it serve as an outlet for normal aggression? Why doesn't all violent content affect every viewer in the same

manner? Does too much consumption of violent media cause violent behavior from viewers? People who consume a lot of media see the world as a more violent and scary place because of the high levels of violence they see (Gerbner).

The theory has been extended to address the more general influences of media on human social life and personal beliefs (Lowery; DeFleur). Media present cultural realities such as fear of victimization (Sparks and Ogles), body image, promiscuity, religion, families, attitudes toward racism (Allen and Hatchett), sex roles, and drug use. Kilbourne states, “Advertising doesn’t cause eating problems, of course, any more than it causes alcoholism. [However,] advertising does promote abusive and abnormal attitudes about eating, drinking, and thinness” (261). Gerbner developed the three B’s, which state that media *blurs* people’s traditional distinctions of reality, *blends* people’s realities into one common cultural mainstream, and *bends* the mainstream to fit its institutional interests and the interests of its sponsors.

Media Imperialism

Media imperialism is a theory that explains how media from powerful countries can have a strong influence on other parts of the world. When movies, television shows, news, and digital platforms from dominant nations are widely shared, they may shape how people in other countries think, communicate, and understand their own cultures. This can make local media less visible and increase the influence of a small number of global media producers. The concept of media imperialism can help us understand how media power and cultural influence are connected on a global level.

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15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0

Learning Objectives

- Identify some of the major social networking sites.
- Show the positive and negative effects of blogs on the distribution and creation of information.
- Explain new concerns that have arisen with the rise of participatory media.
- Explore ways social media has been used for activism and social change.

While traditional theories of mass communication help us understand how messages flow and influence audiences, the rise of social media has transformed the process. Instead of information moving primarily through a few gatekeepers, today's platforms allow almost anyone to create, share, and amplify content. This shift—sometimes referred to as **Web 2.0**—continues to blur the line between mass communication and interpersonal communication, raising new questions about power, influence, and participation in the digital age.



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Figure 15.3.1 User-Generated Content

Social Media and User-Generated Content

Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and Threads allow users to create profiles, share content, and connect with others around the world. Each platform supports different communication styles and serves distinct purposes. For example, LinkedIn is focused on professional networking and career development, while TikTok and Instagram center on entertainment, visual storytelling, and self-expression. These platforms are now central to everyday communication. They help users express opinions, promote causes, share experiences, and build personal or professional networks. The choice of platform often reflects a user's goals—whether staying connected with friends and family, growing an audience, or joining global conversations.

Platform Culture and Emotional Expression

Social media design and cultural norms shape how people express emotions online. For example, TikTok users often share personal stories or feelings through music and short videos, while LinkedIn users tend to keep posts professional and

achievement-oriented. These patterns reflect broader cultural values. In individualistic cultures, emotional openness is often encouraged. In collectivistic cultures, expression may be more reserved to preserve group harmony.

Blogs, Microblogs, and Evolving Expression

Blogs, popularized in the early 2000s, remain relevant on platforms like WordPress, Medium, and Substack. They are used for reflection, opinion-sharing, education, or storytelling. In contrast, microblogs like X and Threads focus on short, timely updates. This evolution in content style reflects changing preferences for quicker, more digestible communication, especially in fast-paced social environments.

Web 2.0 and Participatory Media

Web 2.0 refers to a shift in how the internet is used—not just to consume content, but to create and interact with it. Platforms like YouTube (video sharing), Reddit (community-based discussion), Wikipedia (crowd-sourced knowledge), and Pinterest (visual discovery) rely on user-generated content and interactivity. This participatory model has transformed how people access information, blending creators and consumers into one role. During breaking news events or social movements, platforms like TikTok and X are often sources for real-time updates and citizen journalism. While this creates opportunities for direct communication, it also raises concerns about misinformation and the need for media literacy.

Social Media and Social Change

Social media has become a powerful tool for activism and social change. Hashtags like #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #ClimateStrike have helped mobilize global movements, drawing attention to issues and encouraging civic participation. These platforms provide space for marginalized voices, helping individuals organize protests, raise awareness, and pressure institutions for change. Unlike traditional media, social platforms allow everyday users to participate in public discourse and share personal stories that challenge dominant narratives. While this accessibility empowers users, it also requires critical thinking and ethical engagement with content. The speed and reach of social media make it a double-edged sword—capable of spreading both positive change and harmful misinformation.

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15.4: Media Literacy

Learning Objectives

- Explore the skills needed to be "media literate"
- Understand the SIFT Method
- Consider what AI might mean to media literacy going forward

Media literacy is our awareness regarding our mediated environment or consumption of mass communication. It is our ability to responsibly comprehend, access, and use mass communication in our personal and professional lives. Potter states that we should maintain cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral awareness as we interact with media. Baran suggests a number of skills we can develop in order to be media literate:

Media Literacy Skills

Understand and respect the power of mass communication messages. An important skill for media literacy is to acknowledge just how dominant mass communication is in our lives and around the globe. Through mass communication, media shape, entertain, inform, represent, reflect, create, move, educate, and affect our behaviors, attitudes, values, and habits in direct and indirect ways. Virtually everyone in the world has been touched in some way by mass communication and has made personal and professional decisions largely based on representations of reality portrayed through mass communication. We must understand and respect the power media have in our lives and understand how we make sense of certain meanings.

Understand content by paying attention and filtering out noise. As we learned in Chapter 1, anything that hinders communication is noise. Much of the noise in mass communication originates with our consumption behaviors. How often do you do something other than pay complete attention to the media that you're accessing? Do you listen to the radio while you drive, watch television while you eat, or text message a friend while you're in class? When it comes to mass communication, we tend to multitask, an act that acts as noise and impacts the quality of the messages and our understanding of their meanings. We often turn ourselves into passive consumers, not really paying attention to the messages we receive as we perform other tasks while consuming media.

Understand emotional versus reasoned reactions to mass communication content in order to act accordingly. A great deal of mass communication content is intended to touch us on an emotional level. Therefore, it's important to understand our emotional reactions to mass communication. Advertising often appeals to our emotions in order to sell products (Jhally). "Sex sells" is an old advertising adage but one that highlights how often we make decisions based on emotional reactions versus reasoned actions. Glance through magazines like *Maxim* or *Glamour*, and you'll quickly realize how the emotions associated with sex are used to sell products of all kinds. Reasoned actions require us to think critically about the mass communication we consume before we come to conclusions simply based on our emotional responses.

Develop heightened expectations of mass communication and social media content. Would you consider yourself an informed consumer of mass communication? Do you expect a lot from mass communication? You may like a mystery novel because it's fun, or a movie might take your mind off of reality for a few hours. However, Baran challenges us to require more from the media we consume. "When we expect little from the content before us, we tend to give meaning-making little effort and attention." It depends on what you're willing to accept as quality. Some people may watch fewer and fewer mainstream movies because they think the current movies in theaters are low culture or are aimed at less-educated audiences. They may begin to look for more foreign films, independent films, and documentaries rather than go to see the popular movies released by Hollywood. Shows such as *The Daily Show* or *Last Week Tonight* effectively blurred the lines between comedy and news, and both became recognized as credible sources for news information. Even ninety years ago, Walter Lippmann recognized that media are so invasive in our lives that we might have difficulty distinguishing between what is real and what is manipulated by the media. The reality TV genre is now blurring these lines even more. We may be familiar with President Donald Trump's many appearances on television and subsequent role as the boss on *The Apprentice*. Even earlier examples include the election of two other actors as governor of California: Arnold Schwarzenegger, referred to as the "governator," a blurring of his fictional role as the Terminator and his real role as California's governor; and eventual president Ronald Reagan, sometimes referred to as "Bonzo" in reference to one of his most famous roles in a 1950s film series centered on human friendships with a chimpanzee.

Think critically about mass communication messages, no matter how credible their source. It is essential that we critically consider the source of all mass communication and social media messages. No matter how credible a media source, we can't always believe everything we see or hear because all mass communication is motivated by political, profit, or personal factors. Publicists, editors, and publishers present the information from their perspective—informed by their experiences and agendas. Even if the motive is pure or the spin is minimal, we tend to selectively interpret meanings based on our own lived experiences. Audiences do not always hold similar perceptions regarding mediated messages. Below you will find one easy method to help you do this evaluation.



Figure 15.4.1 Fake News?

The SIFT Method: A Strategy for Evaluating Online Information

In an era of rapid information sharing, individuals must learn to evaluate digital content quickly and effectively. The **SIFT method**, developed by media literacy educator Mike Caulfield, provides a simple framework for fact-checking and critical evaluation of online information. The acronym **SIFT** stands for **Stop, Investigate the Source, Find Better Coverage,** and **Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media to the Original Context**.

- **Stop:** The first step is to pause before accepting or sharing information. Ask yourself: *Do I know this source? Does it have a reputation for accuracy?* Taking a moment to stop helps prevent impulsive decisions that may spread misinformation.
- **Investigate the Source:** Next, examine who is behind the information. A quick search of the author, organization, or publication often reveals their reliability, expertise, or potential bias. Investigating the source ensures that readers do not rely solely on unfamiliar or unverified voices.
- **Find Better Coverage:** Instead of evaluating a claim in isolation, look for how it is reported by other outlets. If established, credible sources confirm the claim, it is more likely to be trustworthy. If no reliable coverage exists, the information may be questionable or misleading.
- **Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media to the Original Context:** Many viral images, statistics, or quotations are taken out of context. Tracing them back to their original source allows readers to see the full picture and understand whether the information has been misrepresented or manipulated.

The SIFT method emphasizes efficiency over exhaustive research. By applying these four moves, individuals develop the habits of mind needed to navigate today's information environment with greater confidence. Rather than discouraging engagement with media, SIFT equips readers to participate thoughtfully, responsibly, and critically in the digital public sphere.

Media Literacy in the AI Age

In today's digital environment, media literacy is no longer just about evaluating newspapers, television, or websites. Artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced new challenges and opportunities for how we consume and create information. AI now powers tools that generate news articles, edit videos, create images, and even mimic human voices. While these technologies can improve access to information, they also make it harder to distinguish between authentic and artificial content. For example,

deepfakes—highly realistic AI-generated videos—pose growing risks for misinformation and require new levels of digital literacy (Jinnette, 2025).

Being media literate in the AI age means learning to question not only what we see but how it was created. Studies show that people often struggle to detect when media is artificially generated, underscoring the importance of teaching these skills across cultures and contexts (Frank et al., 2023). This includes asking critical questions such as: Who made this message? What technology shaped it? What might be missing or distorted?

At the same time, AI can support media literacy by offering tools to fact-check claims, detect manipulated images, and personalize learning. The key is balance—understanding both the risks of misinformation and the possibilities for more informed, critical engagement with media. In short, media literacy today requires becoming "AI literate" as well: knowing how artificial intelligence shapes our information environment and learning to navigate it responsibly (Frank et al., 2023; Jinnette, 2025).

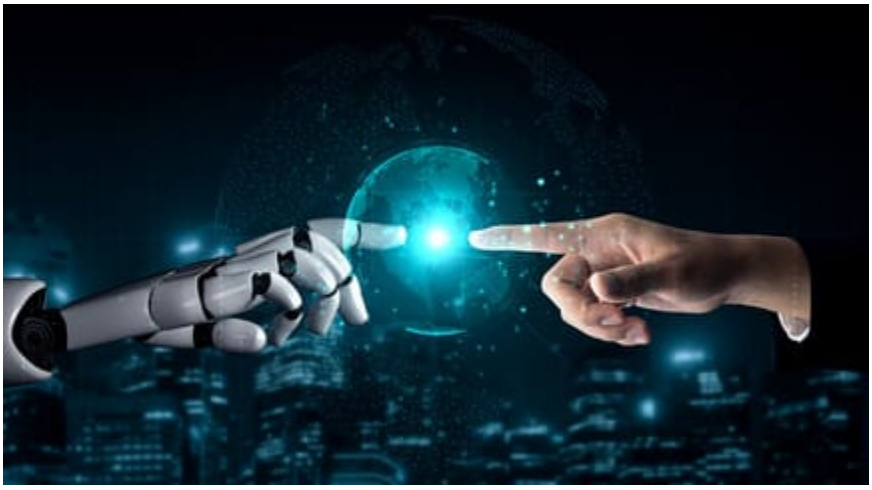


Figure 15.4.2 Human-AI Touch

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INDEX

A

ableism
8.2: Intercultural Identity

abstract
3.3: Using Words Well

accent
3.4: Language, Society, and Culture

accommodating
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

achievement oriented leader
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

active listening
5.2: Importance of Listening
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
5.4: Improving Listening Competence

adaptors
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

adjourning
9.2: Small Group Development

advertising
15.1: Defining Mass Communication

anxiety
12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA)

artifacts
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

attachment theory
6.3: Emotions and Interpersonal Communication

attention
2.1: Perception Process
5.1: Listening Process

attention getter
11.5: Introductions and Conclusions
13.4: Developing Informative Speeches

attributions
2.2: Perceiving Others

audience
15.1: Defining Mass Communication

audience adaptation
11.2: Audience Analysis

audience analysis
11.2: Audience Analysis

autocratic leadership
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

avoiding
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

B

back channel cues
5.1: Listening Process

backing
14.4: Persuasive Strategies

bias
2.2: Perceiving Others

body
11.3: The Topic and Thesis
11.4: The Body

brainstorming
10.3: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

C

Causal Pattern
14.5: Persuasive Speech Organization

characteristics of small groups
9.1: Understanding Small Groups

chronemics
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

claim
14.4: Persuasive Strategies

closure
11.5: Introductions and Conclusions

coercive
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

coercive power
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

cognitive barriers
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening

cognitive process
5.1: Listening Process

cognitive psychology
2.1: Perception Process

cognitive restructuring
12.5: Cognitive Restructuring and Building Confidence

cohesion
9.3: Small Group Dynamics

collaborating
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

collectivist
6.3: Emotions and Interpersonal Communication
8.5: How Scholars Study Intercultural Communication

communication accommodation theory
3.4: Language, Society, and Culture

communication apprehension
12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA)

communication competence
1.4: Communication Competence

communication ethics
1.3: Communication Principles

competing
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

compromising
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

conflict
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

conflict management
1.4: Communication Competence

conformity
9.3: Small Group Dynamics

connotative
3.1: Language and Meaning

consensus
10.3: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

content creation
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0

context
1.3: Communication Principles
4.3: Nonverbal Communication Competence
8.5: How Scholars Study Intercultural Communication

credibility
12.1: Incorporating Evidence/Sources

critical listening
5.2: Importance of Listening

critical thinking
5.1: Listening Process

cultivation theory
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication

cultural bias
3.4: Language, Society, and Culture

cultural influences
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

culture
1.3: Communication Principles
15.4: Media Literacy

D

deception
4.1: Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

decoding
1.2: The Communication Process

definitional speech
13.3: Types of Informative Speeches

demographics
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0

denotative
3.1: Language and Meaning

descriptive speech
13.3: Types of Informative Speeches

dialect
3.4: Language, Society, and Culture

digital
15.1: Defining Mass Communication

Direct Method Pattern
14.5: Persuasive Speech Organization

directive leader
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

dominant group
8.3: Discussing Intercultural Communication

E

effective communication
1.4: Communication Competence

effective feedback
5.4: Improving Listening Competence

effective listening
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening

emblems
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication
emergent leader
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
emotion
6.3: Emotions and Interpersonal Communication
emotional intelligence
6.3: Emotions and Interpersonal Communication
emotional support
5.2: Importance of Listening
empathetic listening
2.4: Improving Perception
5.2: Importance of Listening
5.4: Improving Listening Competence
empathy
8.4: Belonging
encoding
1.2: The Communication Process
entertainment
15.4: Media Literacy
environmental factors
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
ethical communication
1.1: Communication - History and Forms
1.4: Communication Competence
ethnicity
8.2: Intercultural Identity
ethnocentrism
8.3: Discussing Intercultural Communication
ethos
14.4: Persuasive Strategies
evaluation
2.2: Perceiving Others
examples
12.1: Incorporating Evidence/Sources
expectations
2.1: Perception Process
expert power
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
explanatory speech
13.3: Types of Informative Speeches
extemporaneous
12.3: Delivery
external attribution
2.2: Perceiving Others

F

face
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication
facework
6.2: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication
family traditions
7.3: Communication and Families
feedback
1.2: The Communication Process
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self
5.1: Listening Process
5.4: Improving Listening Competence
forming
9.2: Small Group Development
friends with benefits
7.2: Communication and Friends
functional leader
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
fundamental attribution error
2.2: Perceiving Others

G

gender
8.2: Intercultural Identity
global village
8.1: Intercultural Communication Overview
globalization
15.1: Defining Mass Communication
group communication
1.1: Communication - History and Forms
group development
9.2: Small Group Development
group size
9.1: Understanding Small Groups
group socialization
9.3: Small Group Dynamics
groupthink
9.3: Small Group Dynamics

H

haptics
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication
hostile audience
14.2: Approaching Audiences
human communication
1.1: Communication - History and Forms

I

ideal self
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self
identity
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self
identity development
8.4: Belonging
identity needs
1.3: Communication Principles
illustrators
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication
impression management
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self
impromptu
12.3: Delivery
individualist
6.3: Emotions and Interpersonal Communication
8.5: How Scholars Study Intercultural Communication
influence
15.4: Media Literacy
influencers
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0
information processing
2.1: Perception Process
informational listening
5.2: Importance of Listening
informative speaking
13.1: Functions of Informative Speeches
instrumental goals
6.1: Principles of Interpersonal Communication
interaction model
1.2: The Communication Process
internal attribution
2.2: Perceiving Others
interpersonal conflict
9.3: Small Group Dynamics
interpretation
2.1: Perception Process
interpreting
5.1: Listening Process
intersectionality
8.2: Intercultural Identity
intimate partner violence
7.6: The Dark Side of Relationships

J

Johari window
6.4: Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Communication
journalism
15.1: Defining Mass Communication

K

Kinesics
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

L

language acquisition
3.1: Language and Meaning
leaders
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
leadership styles
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
legitimate power
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
listening
5.1: Listening Process
5.4: Improving Listening Competence
listening skills
1.4: Communication Competence
5.2: Importance of Listening
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
5.4: Improving Listening Competence
listening styles
5.2: Importance of Listening
logical fallacies
14.4: Persuasive Strategies
logos
14.4: Persuasive Strategies
looking glass self
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self
lying
7.6: The Dark Side of Relationships

M

magic bullet theory
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication
maintenance roles
10.2: Group Member Roles

majority rule
10.3: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups
manuscript
12.3: Delivery
marketing
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0
mass communication
1.1: Communication - History and Forms
15.1: Defining Mass Communication
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication
15.4: Media Literacy
media
15.1: Defining Mass Communication
15.4: Media Literacy
media communication
1.1: Communication - History and Forms
media imperialism
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication
media influence
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication
media literacy
15.4: Media Literacy
memorized speaking
12.3: Delivery
memory
5.1: Listening Process
message
1.2: The Communication Process
minority rule
10.3: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups
mirroring
4.3: Nonverbal Communication Competence
Monroe's Motivated Sequence
14.5: Persuasive Speech Organization
motivation
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

N

negative group roles
10.2: Group Member Roles
neologisms
3.2: Functions of Language
neutral audience
14.2: Approaching Audiences
noise
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
nondominant group
8.3: Discussing Intercultural Communication
nonverbal
4.1: Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication
Nonverbal Communication
1.1: Communication - History and Forms
1.3: Communication Principles
nonverbal messages
5.1: Listening Process
norming
9.2: Small Group Development
Nuclear families
7.3: Communication and Families

O

organization
2.1: Perception Process
ought self
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

P

paralanguage
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication
pathos
14.4: Persuasive Strategies
perception
2.1: Perception Process
2.2: Perceiving Others
performing
9.2: Small Group Development
personal barriers
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
personal communication
1.4: Communication Competence
personal growth
2.4: Improving Perception
persuasion
15.4: Media Literacy
persuasive speaking
14.1: What is Persuasive Speaking?
physiological noise
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
polarizing language
3.3: Using Words Well
political correctness
3.4: Language, Society, and Culture
power
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
prejudice
2.4: Improving Perception
prejudices
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
presentation aids
12.2: Visual Aids
Primacy Effect
2.2: Perceiving Others
privacy
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0
privilege
8.3: Discussing Intercultural Communication
problem solving
10.3: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups
procedural conflict
9.3: Small Group Dynamics
professional communication
1.4: Communication Competence
professional development
5.2: Importance of Listening
proposition of fact
14.3: Functions and Types of Persuasive Speeches
proposition of policy
14.3: Functions and Types of Persuasive Speeches
proposition of value
14.3: Functions and Types of Persuasive Speeches
proxemics
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication
psychological noise
5.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
public communication
1.1: Communication - History and Forms
Public Speaking
1.4: Communication Competence
11.1: Public Speaking Overview
5.4: Improving Listening Competence

R

race
8.2: Intercultural Identity
receiver
1.2: The Communication Process
Recency Effect
2.2: Perceiving Others
receptive audience
14.2: Approaching Audiences
receptive friendships
7.2: Communication and Friends
reciprocal friendships
7.2: Communication and Friends
referent power
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
Refutation Pattern
14.5: Persuasive Speech Organization
relational goals
6.1: Principles of Interpersonal Communication
relational maintenance
7.4: Romantic Relationships
relational needs
1.3: Communication Principles
relationship stages
7.1: Foundations of Relationships
reward power
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

S

salience
2.1: Perception Process
schemata
2.1: Perception Process
scrutiny fear
12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA)
selection
2.1: Perception Process
sender
1.2: The Communication Process
sexual orientation
8.2: Intercultural Identity
signposting
11.4: The Body
slang
3.2: Functions of Language
slides
12.2: Visual Aids
social class
8.2: Intercultural Identity
social comparison
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

social exchange theory
7.1: Foundations of Relationships
social media
15.1: Defining Mass Communication
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0
15.4: Media Literacy
social penetration theory
6.4: Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Communication
socialization
2.4: Improving Perception
9.2: Small Group Development
speaker credibility
11.5: Introductions and Conclusions
special occasion speech
11.1: Public Speaking Overview
specific purpose
11.3: The Topic and Thesis
state anxiety
12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA)
stereotypes
2.2: Perceiving Others
2.4: Improving Perception
stimuli
2.1: Perception Process
storming
9.2: Small Group Development
strategies for communication
1.4: Communication Competence
substantive conflict
9.3: Small Group Dynamics
supportive leader
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication

T

technology
15.1: Defining Mass Communication
15.4: Media Literacy
tension
9.3: Small Group Dynamics
testimony
12.1: Incorporating Evidence/Sources
thesis
11.3: The Topic and Thesis
topic
11.3: The Topic and Thesis
trait anxiety
12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA)
trait based leadership
10.1: Leadership and Small Group Communication
transaction model
1.2: The Communication Process
transitions
11.4: The Body
transmission model
1.2: The Communication Process
triangle of meaning
3.1: Language and Meaning
types of friends
7.2: Communication and Friends

U

user experience
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0
uses and gratification
15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication

V

verbal communication
1.1: Communication - History and Forms
verbal messages
5.1: Listening Process
visual aids
12.2: Visual Aids
vocalics
4.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

W

warrant
14.4: Persuasive Strategies
Web 2.0
15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0
whiteness
8.3: Discussing Intercultural Communication
workplace relationships
7.5: Relationships at Work

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GLOSSARY

S

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

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Discussion Questions/Conversation Starters

Chapter 1:

1. Think of a person you know who you think possesses a high level of communication competence. What makes you think this? What communication characteristics do they have that you might want to have yourself?
2. What types of noise do you tend to find most distracting? Why?
3. Come up with your own definition of communication. How does it differ from the definition in the book? Why did you choose to define communication the way you did?
4. Use the transaction model of communication to analyze a recent communication encounter you had. Sketch out the communication encounter and make sure to label each part of the model (communicators; message; channel; feedback; and physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts).
5. Identify some physical, instrumental, relational, and identity needs that communication helps you meet in a given day.

Chapter 2:

1. Recount a recent communication encounter in which perception checking may have led to a more positive result. What could you have done differently?
2. Do you think "reliable narrators" (accurate storytellers) exist? Why or why not?
3. What types of things tend to draw your attention first when you look around? Why?
4. 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?
5. Discuss the notion that social media has increased our degree of self-consciousness. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Chapter 3:

1. Are there words you hear that make you want to stop listening to someone when you hear them? What are they and why?
2. Recall a conversation that became awkward when you or the other person deviated from the social norms that manage conversation flow. Was the awkwardness at the beginning, end, or during a topic change? After reviewing some of the common norms discussed in the chapter, what do you think was the source of the awkwardness?
3. Apply the triangle of meaning to a recent message exchange you had in which differing referents led to misunderstanding. What could you have done to help prevent or correct the misunderstanding?
4. Following the ladder of abstraction, take a common word referring to an object (like *bicycle* or *smartphone*) and write its meaning, in your own words, at each step from most concrete to most abstract. Discuss how the meaning changes as the word/idea becomes more abstract and how the word becomes more difficult to define.

Chapter 4:

1. What does the phrase "it's not what you said, it's how you said it" mean to you? How can you change meaning without changing the words that you're saying?
2. 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.
3. Discuss an experience where you have had some kind of miscommunication or misunderstanding because of cultural differences in encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. What did you learn in this chapter that could help you in similar future interactions?
4. 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?
5. 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.

Chapter 5:

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. If I were to describe listening as a superpower, what do I mean by that?
4. What's the biggest barrier to you listening effectively on a daily basis? Why?

Chapter 6:

1. Why can it be beneficial to have healthy differences or conflict in relationships? What are some potential consequences of having no conflict?
2. When I say "all self-disclosure comes with risk," what do I mean by that? Why don't we just tell people everything about us on the first day we meet them?
3. Answer the questions from the beginning of the section: Have you ever said too much on a first date? At a job interview? To a professor? Have you ever posted something on social media only to return later to remove it? If you answered yes to any of the questions, what have you learned in this chapter that may have led you to do something differently?
4. Under what circumstances is it OK to share information that someone has disclosed to you? Under what circumstances is to not OK to share the information?

Chapter 7:

1. After reading about Social Exchange Theory, it's easy to think individuals should leave relationships that are inequitable or when the costs outweigh the benefits, but why might someone stay in what appears to be a "bad" relationship?
2. Describe a situation in which lying affected one of your interpersonal relationships. What was the purpose of the lie and how did the lie affect the relationship?
3. How do you think technology has impacted the development of romantic relationships?
4. Identify and describe a ritual you have experienced for each of the following: patterned family interaction, family tradition, and family celebration. How did each of those come to be a ritual in your family?
5. Social network overlap affects a romantic relationship in many ways. What are some positives and negatives of network overlap?

Chapter 8:

1. Identify an intercultural encounter in which you did not communicate as competently as you would have liked. What concept(s) from the chapter would have helped you in this situation and how?
2. What can happen when an individual's cultural identity isn't represented by a larger group?
3. Think about the diversity in some of the shows that you watch. Before doing any research, write down the different cultural identities that you think are represented in a couple of your favorite shows or movies. Then go and actually research the show or movie (look up the cast online, etc.) to see if your perceptions matched up with reality. Are the shows diverse? Why or why not? If there are minority characters, are they portrayed in stereotypical or narrow ways?
4. Do you ever have difficulty discussing different cultural identities due to terminology? If so, what are your uncertainties? What did you learn in this chapter that can help you overcome them?

Chapter 9:

1. Groupthink is a negative group dynamic that relates to cohesion and conformity pressures. Several historic events with far-reaching and devastating implications have been analyzed through the lens of groupthink. Choose one of the following examples, and do some Internet research on your own. Then explain how groupthink played a role in the event.
    - The Watergate scandal and cover-up (1972–74)
    - The space shuttle Challenger explosion (1986)
    - The rationale for the invasion of Iraq—specifically the supposed existence of weapons of mass destruction (2001–2)

2. How might you handle group conflict differently in an academic context versus a professional context? Why? Include a reference to a specific type of conflict discussed in this section and discuss which conflict management strategies discussed in the chapter might be best in each context.
3. Synergy is one of the main advantages of small group communication. Explain a time when a group you were in benefited from or failed to achieve synergy. What contributed to your success/failure?
4. Recall a previous or current small group to which you belonged/belong. Trace the group's development using the five stages discussed in this section. Did you experience all the stages? In what order? Did you stay in some stages more than others?

Chapter 10:

1. When you work in small groups, either formally or informally, do you have a type of role you tend to fall into? Do your best to explain using the group roles from the chapter.
2. Describe the best leader you've ever had. What made them great?
3. In what situations would a designated leader be better than an emergent leader, and vice versa? Why?
4. Describe a situation in which you have witnessed a person playing one of the self-centered roles in a group. How did the person communicate? What were the effects? Now describe a situation in which you have witnessed a person playing one of the unproductive roles in a group. How did the person communicate? What were the effects?

Chapter 11:

1. In what ways does public speaking differ from interpersonal and small group communication?
2. Why might public speaking require more planning and responsibility than other types of communication?
3. Why is understanding the audience considered the first step in developing an effective speech, and how might a lack of audience awareness affect the success of a presentation?
4. How can a speaker balance staying true to their message while still adapting it to the audience's knowledge, attitudes, and expectations?

Chapter 12:

1. What are you most looking forward to or most dreading about giving speeches in this class?
2. List three strategies you will try to manage your speech anxiety the next time you have to give a speech.
3. What nonverbal adaptors have you noticed that others use while speaking? Are you aware of any nonverbal adaptors that you have used? If so, what are they?
4. Working with a partner, read aloud what you've written of your speech and identify places that can be reworded to make it easier for you to deliver.

Chapter 13:

1. Of the four methods of informing (through definition, description, demonstration, or explanation), which do you think is most effective for you? Why?
2. Getting integrated: How might you use informative speaking in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic?
3. What are some ways that you can avoid becoming persuasive in an informative speech? List strategies.

Chapter 14:

1. What types of persuasive messages work best on you? Why? (Which commercials or ads make you want to go buy stuff?)
2. Which of the fallacies have you seen recently? Either in media or in your daily lives. Explain.
3. Ethos, or credibility, is composed of three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism. Of those dimensions, which is most important for you when judging someone's credibility and why?
4. Imagine that you will be delivering a persuasive speech to a group of prospective students considering attending your school. What could you say that would appeal to their safety needs? Their social needs? Their self-esteem needs?

Chapter 15:

1. Which function of mass media (information, interpretation, instructive, bonding, or diversion) do you think is most important for you and why? Which is most important for society and why?
2. As we learned, many of the media messages that are exported from the United States to other countries end up supporting narrow stereotypes about US Americans. What media messages do you think would be better to export in order to allow other countries to see a more “accurate” picture of American life? Try to think of several examples of television programs, movies, websites, and so on.
3. Aside from using social media to maintain interpersonal connections, how have you used social media to collaborate or share information?
4. Discuss the ways in which new media have democratized access to information and allowed people to participate in more of a dialogue with media outlets, government officials, political candidates, and/or individuals.
5. Do you find the constant connectivity that comes with personal media overstimulating or comforting?

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  - 11.5: Introductions and Conclusions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 11.6: Public Speaking Virtually - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12: Preparing to Speak and Managing Apprehension - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.1: Incorporating Evidence/Sources - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.2: Visual Aids - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.3: Delivery - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.4: Communication Apprehension (CA) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.5: Cognitive Restructuring and Building Confidence - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13: Informative Speaking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.1: Functions of Informative Speeches - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.2: Role of Speaker - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.3: Types of Informative Speeches - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.4: Developing Informative Speeches - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14: Persuasive Speaking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.1: What is Persuasive Speaking? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.2: Approaching Audiences - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.3: Functions and Types of Persuasive Speeches - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.4: Persuasive Strategies - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.5: Persuasive Speech Organization - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15: Mass Communication, Social Media, and Media Literacy - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.1: Defining Mass Communication - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.2: Grounding Theories of Mass Communication - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.3: Social Media and Web 2.0 - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.4: Media Literacy - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- Back Matter - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - Index - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - Discussion Questions/Conversation Starters - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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