IT'S COMPLICATED: AN INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION



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It's Complicated: An Introduction to Communication

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1: INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION THEORY

1.1: Why Study Communication?

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1.1: Why Study Communication?

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. identify and define the four communication settings.
2. illustrate communication as a transactional process.
3. explain the purposes of communication.
4. summarize the characteristics of communication.
5. explain what makes a competent communicator.

When registering for an "Introduction to Communication" class, most may wonder, "Is this just a public speaking class?" While certainly part of the field of Communication Studies, public speaking is only one of the many areas we address. A better way to consider the field of Communication Studies is to think of it as the study of **oral** and **aural communication.** We look not only at the classic public speaking setting, we also consider how we use oral communication (speaking) and aural communication (listening) to interact with those around us, to build relationships, to satisfy our own personal needs, to exchange information, to persuade others, and to work collaboratively in groups. Public speaking is but one facet of a much larger field.

Studying communication enhances our **soft skills**. As we prepare for a career, we are developing two sets of skills: hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are specific to our fields, such as an accountant who needs to know how to handle credits and debits; a nurse who needs to know human anatomy and how to take a blood pressure reading; or a police officer who needs to know the law and how to use physical force appropriately and judiciously.

Soft skills are those skills that apply across the board and enhance our ability to work with others in a range of settings. These include such skills the ability to work collaboratively, to present ideas effectively in writing or speaking, to listen effectively, to think critically, and to develop and maintain healthy collegial relationships.



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According to *Forbes* magazine, employers look for 10 core skills:

1. Ability to work in a team structure
2. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
3. Ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization
4. Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work

5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to persuade and influence others (Adams, 2014).

Communication Studies addresses many of these skills, especially items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10. This course will introduce these skill areas, and additional Communication Studies classes can advance and refine those skills to an even greater degree. The ideal end result is a strong set of hard skills packaged in a strong set of soft skills; hard skills look great on a resume, and soft skills look great in an interview.

In this course, we will be addressing the three classic settings of communication studies, along with a new, emerging setting. The classic settings are **Interpersonal Communication** (one with one), **Small Group Communication** (several among several), and **Public Speakin**g (one to many). We will also look at the newest communication setting to emerge: **Computer-Mediated Communication** (communication via technology).

We start by reviewing some basics of communication theory which apply to all communication, such as how communication works, perception, verbal and nonverbal communication, listening, and intercultural communication. After looking at this broad foundation, we will then look more deeply at some specific dynamics of each of these communication contexts.

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1.2: Communication Settings

The field of communication studies explores four key settings in which human communication takes place: interpersonal, small group, public speaking, and computer-mediated. Each of these are settings in which people exchange messages and seek shared meaning.

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 is the everyday communication we engage in with our friends, loved ones, work colleagues, or others we encounter. Although we tend to assume this is "one-with-one," it can be among several. So, when at a party, we are engaging in interpersonal communication with quite a few people.

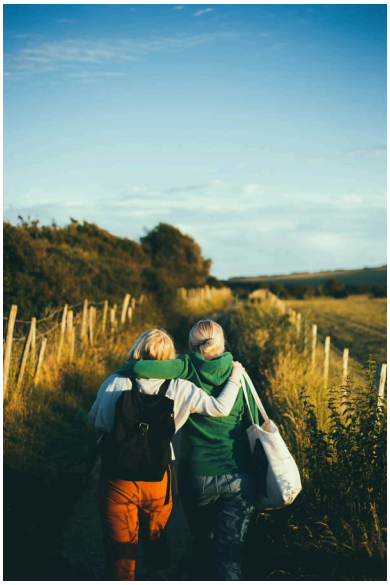


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To understand why we are so driven to engage in interpersonal communication, it is important to first understand the most fundamental drive of communication: to reduce uncertainty. Humans are unique animals in that we can engage in abstract thought, taking in the world around us and converting it to mental images. As far as we know, all other animals live in a world of stimulus-response. They react instinctively to whatever is around them at the moment. If we startle a deer while walking in the woods, it will run regardless of our intent; it does not stop to think about whether we are a threat or not, it just acts.

Humans, on the other hand, use stimulus-*thought*-response. We sense the world around us, we think about it, we talk about it, and finally we respond to it. We respond to thought more than stimulus. According to the theory of General Semantics,

> As human organisms, we have limits as to what we can experience through our senses. Given these limitations, we can never experience "all" of what is "out there" to experience.... To the degree that our reactions and responses to all forms of stimuli are automatic, or conditioned, we copy animals, like Pavlov's dog. To the degree that our reactions and responses are more controlled, delayed, or conditional to the given situation, we exhibit our uniquely-human capabilities (Institute of General Semantics, 2012a).

Communication is the key tool we use to manage and respond to the world around us. It is our key survival tool. By connecting with other humans, we can test and assess our perceptions, our thoughts about the stimuli, to determine if our responses to those thoughts are reasonable.

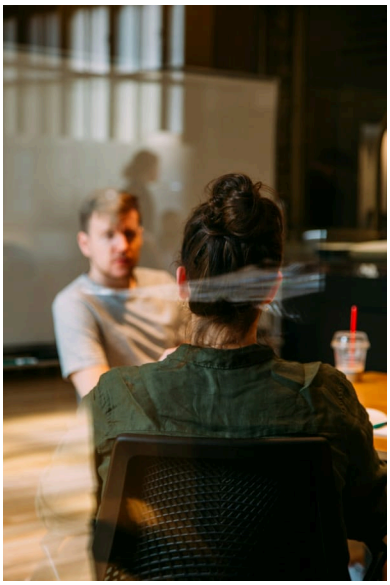


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The overriding goal of interpersonal communication is to reduce uncertainty by fulfilling our needs for **belongingness** and **acceptance**. Humans are deeply social creatures, getting much of our sense of personal value and worth through our interactions with those around us. **Belongingness** is *our need to feel we fit in and belong to a group of some sort*. Each of us has at least one "reference group," a collection of individuals with whom acceptance is extremely important. We spend time with these people, we talk with them, and we joke with them. We care about what they think of us because we are strongly driven to feel we belong to that group; it gives us a place to fit in and feel valued. An intimate relationship with a significant other can also give us a feeling of belongingness. The connections with a long-term partner, parents, or children can give us comfort and certainty in our lives.

Acceptance is not the same as agreement. We look for *those who accept and understand who we are*. Although we can disagree about specific topics or issues, the underlying human relationship is still solid and exists despite those superficial disagreements. They accept our traits, both positive and negative. They like who we are; thus, they accept us as we are, the good and the bad, not necessarily for what we do or for our successes and failures.

Because these two needs are so strong in us, being in a strange place where we know no one can be very unsettling. Consider the awkwardness we feel in a social setting where we do not know many of the others present. Most probably feel a bit lost and uncertain as to we fit in. When in such a setting, most of us will deliberately try to connect with *someone* to fulfill those needs, at least temporarily.

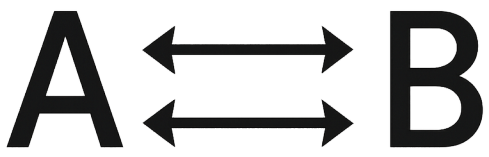


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Image 5 is a simple model for interpersonal communication. The model shows both people as equal, as represented by the letters being the same size and value. The two arrows indicate both individuals communicate equally, in a balanced sense of power, both speaking and listening. This does not mean that in one specific communication encounter everything is exactly equal; rather, it means over the life of the relationship there is a sense of relative balance. For example, in virtually any marriage there will be a division of power with each partner having more power in some areas, but overall, there is a relative balance in worth, value, respect, speaking, and listening.

Small Group Communication

Small Group Communication is described as *several among several*. It is similar to interpersonal in that many of the dynamics of good interpersonal communication apply to several people interacting, but the primary difference is in the goal.

The goal of small group communication is task completion. However, for us to work with a group to effectively complete a task requires our basic interpersonal needs be met. The group communicates and works collaboratively most effectively to achieve a common end result when there is a sense of acceptance and belongingness among members. We are all familiar with what happens when we speak up in a group but get ignored; we quit participating.

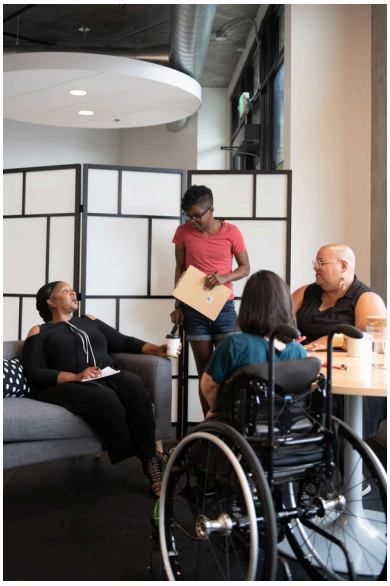


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Image 7 is a simple model for small group communication. In this model, we are looking at a task group of five people. According to Bormann and Bormann (1980), five is the ideal size for a task group. The individuals are all modeled as being of equal value and worth, and the connecting lines indicate all members participate equally with all other group members. Realistically, such equality of participation will not occur in every group meeting; however, this model represents what should occur over the life of that group.

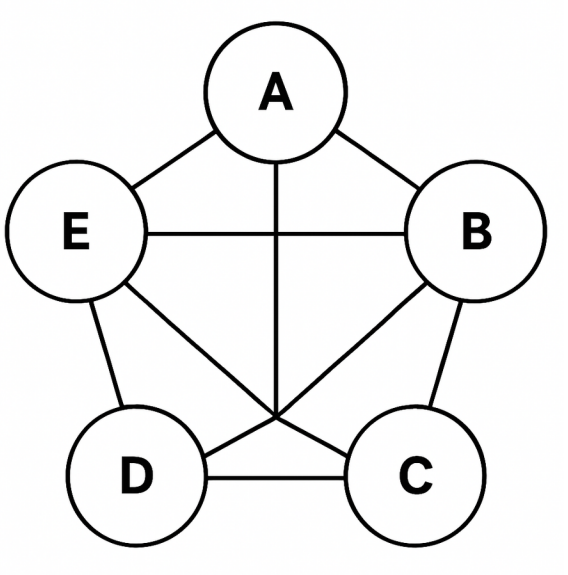


Figure:1.2.7: Image 7

Public Speaking

The third setting is **Public Speaking**. Public speaking can be described as *one to many*. Note for interpersonal and small group, we speak of *with* and *among* others to suggest a sense of mutual exchange and responsibility. In public speaking, however, the majority of the message is from the speaker to the audience, and as a result the speaker carries significantly more responsibility for the success of the communication event. Although the audience does retain some responsibility (attending to the message; decoding; interpreting; asking questions), it is not as equal as with interpersonal and small group. Consider a traditional, college lecture class. We easily accept the greater responsibility the instructor bears over the success of the class, especially in presenting well-developed, clearly structured lectures. The students still have their duties, such as attending class and actively listening, but there is no doubt the instructor bears more responsibility for the speaking situation.



Figure:1.2.8: Image 8 Photo by Miguel Henriques on Unsplash

The goal of public speaking is a transmission of information. The speaker has some sort of idea/information/position to share with the group and shares that information in this primarily unidirectional process.

The model for public speaking, image 9, is somewhat different than for the other two. First, notice the difference between the way the speaker and the audience are modeled. This represents the speaker as the primary source for the communication, having

significantly more responsibility for the creation, sending, and substance of the message. Second, note the smaller, lighter arrows from the audience to the speaker. Audiences communicate with speakers via feedback, ranging from subtle (such as slight facial expression changes) to overt (such as laughter, asking questions, and applause). A good speaker uses feedback to gauge how the event is going. For example, if the audience looks bored, perhaps the speaker needs to liven things up a bit, or if they look confused, perhaps the speaker should rephrase something.

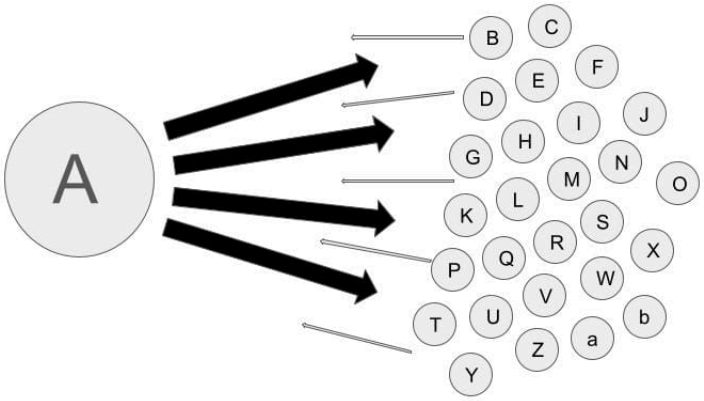


Figure:1.2.9: Image 9

Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is *communication occurring through the use of computer technologies*. If we stop to consider all the ways we communicate via technology, it is mind-boggling. Everything from cell phones, texting, email, social media (like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), discussion boards, and video conferencing all fall in this category.

Although most of those reading this text probably cannot recall a time without the internet or cell phones, in the timeline of human communication, these technologies are still very young. However, they continue to develop at a rapid pace, impacting how we connect with one another in ways we do not yet fully understand. Researchers are investigating ways technology is impacting how we communicate, form and manage relationships, work collaboratively, and even how we maintain a sense of self.

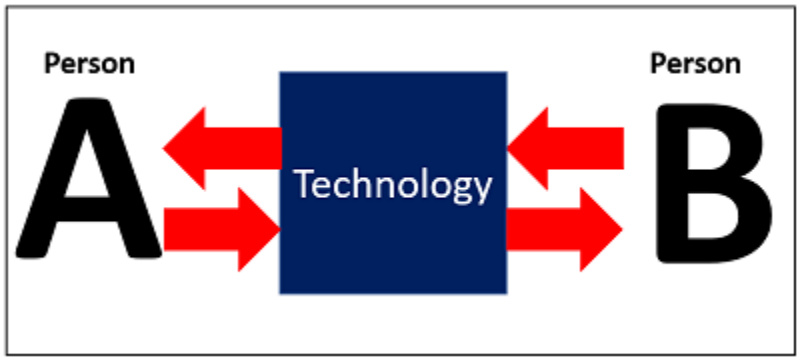


Figure:1.2.10: Image 10

We already know constant connectivity has benefits and drawbacks. Many workplaces have now become a blend of face-to-face and online. An online student shared the first thing she does when she gets to her office is start Skype, a video-conferencing tool, and then spends her day working both with those physically present and those connecting digitally from around the nation and world. We use social media to maintain long-distance relationships which in the not-too-distant past would have faded from lack of contact. Distant family members can remain connected, sharing special events or even just daily life. Funerals, weddings, and other important ceremonies are no longer limited to those who can travel to attend. In addition to personal use, organizations can

save millions in travel costs using CMC tools. Our own University of Alaska higher education system holds hundreds of meetings annually via CMC tools, saving travel costs and time away from other duties.

Even more striking is the ability of people to use social media tools to effect social change. The first, large social movement facilitated by CMC was the Arab Spring of 2011. Through the use of CMC tools like X and Facebook, hundreds of thousands of disaffected citizens of several Middle Eastern countries took to the streets in protest of the status quo. More recently, the United States saw large protests of President Donald Trump's policies, protests largely organized using social media. Through this instantaneous, non-controlled mode of communication, people can find and connect with those sharing their concerns and passions.

There may be some influences of CMC that are more troubling. Attention spans may be shrinking. With X's 280-character limit and the proliferation of short-form videos on every platform, we are becoming more and more accustomed to brief, pithy messages instead of well-developed and thoughtful discourse. Managing boredom without technology may be more difficult. With the endless internet, even the slightest sense of boredom can be immediately alleviated by simply searching for something new. Since so many needs can now be fulfilled without stepping outside, those who are shy and reluctant to leave the comfort of their home can become even more isolated, with basic necessities such as groceries available for delivery via online marketplaces. Your authors have noticed a dramatic change on college campuses; while waiting for a class to start, instead of talking and developing friendships, students are silently attentive to their phones. Since we can now avoid awkward social situations by simply looking at our phones, the ability to initiate and maintain casual, acquaintance-level conversations is not needed, so the skill of “small talk” is not practiced and developed.

We have fingertip access to virtually the entire knowledge base of the human race, bringing centuries of learning to the remotest parts of our world. We have also seen the explosion of echo chambers and confirmation bias. There are so many sources of information targeted to specific political viewpoints people can choose to read or view only the news and information reinforcing the validity of their existing positions. In other words, instead of sharing common sources of information, conservatives consume conservative news and liberals consume liberal news. Since humans avoid uncertainty, echo chambers feed on our drive for information confirming our existing worldview, affirming our worldview is the “correct” view of reality.



Figure:1.2.11: Image 11

As we have argued, the field of Communication Studies is far more than just public speaking. We consider the entire human communication process, looking to understand the dynamics of each of these settings to be better equipped to make thoughtful choices in managing those encounters. While each of these contexts has its own unique traits, they all share the basic communication process, which we'll explore in the next chapter.

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1.3: The Communication Process

Human communication, at its best, is a process filled with complexity and hindrances. We certainly experience moments in which we feel we have really "connected" with others, but such moments are the exception to the rule. Due to the very involved and multi-faceted nature of communication, it is highly prone to breakdowns and errors. We have all experienced the frustrations of agreeing with someone about something, believing we completely understood one another, only to find later that the other person's idea of what we agreed to is totally different than our own.

By understanding the complexity of communication, we are more capable of diagnosing communication problems, and more equipped to identify and employ solutions to those problems.

Communication is *the transactional process of using symbolic language to stimulate shared meaning***.** This definition is complex, and each component needs careful consideration.

Transactional

To understand the concept of **transactional**, we need to see where communication theory was in the past, and where are we today. At first, communication was seen as a linear process. The sender said something to the receiver. The receiver then processed the message to understand it. The problem with this approach is it only shows communication as flowing one direction; it does not account for the fact many of our messages are responses to what we heard or experienced. The linear model does not allow for nor describe the relationship of one message to another.

We then moved to a circular model which shows the sender sends a message to the receiver, and then the receiver sends a message back to the sender as *feedback* to what was said. In effect, the sender becomes the receiver, and the receiver becomes the sender. If Madison tells a joke and the class laughs, she is sending a message (the joke) and the class is sending feedback (laughter). The circular model accurately describes what happened. This model is much better in that it accounts for those related messages; however, it can also suggest *all* messages have a causal relationship with what was just experienced. This simply is not true. Many messages are independent of what was just experienced.

For instance, something like clothing usually does not fit the circular model. If Lucinda is wearing a uniform to work because it is required, fits the circular model; she is wearing the uniform because of a message from her employer. Rarely, however, is our choice of clothing a response to a message; more often it is what we feel like wearing. The circular model does not account for this independence.

The linear model is too narrow, and the circular model is too broad. Today, we use the transactional model of communication. The **transactional model** says we have *multiple messages flowing simultaneously between people*. Some messages are independent, and some messages are causal (or feedback). As we interact, we sort out these messages, distinguishing feedback from independent messages.

Task-shifting comes easily to us: “we are capable of receiving, decoding, and responding to another person’s behavior, while at the same time that other person is receiving and responding to ours” (Adler, 2012). Our brains have enormous processing power, so to engage in these simultaneous tasks is quite easy.

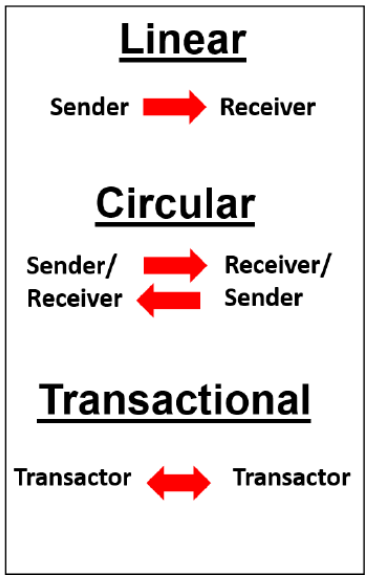


Figure:1.3.12: Image 12

A Process

Communication is a **process**, instead of a single act. A process is *an event comprised of many parts, working together, with each part having a dependence on the other*. Consider the complexity of a car. It works via a process of many different parts operating in concert to produce propulsion. If any one part breaks down, depending on how integral it is to the process, the whole vehicle stops moving. Communication is similar in that if a key part of the process fails, the whole thing stops working. Or, if a secondary part fails, it may keep running, but not smoothly. Either way, if one part fails, the whole process is affected.

Symbolic

The next part of the definition, **symbolic language**, requires we think about what language actually is. Whether written or spoken, language is *a set of sounds or shapes to which we attach meaning*. When looking at this text, students are simply looking at a series of shapes on a page. The shapes are inherently meaningless. When we speak, all we are doing is making sound and using the structures of our mouth to shape sound into certain patterns, but those sounds also are meaningless.

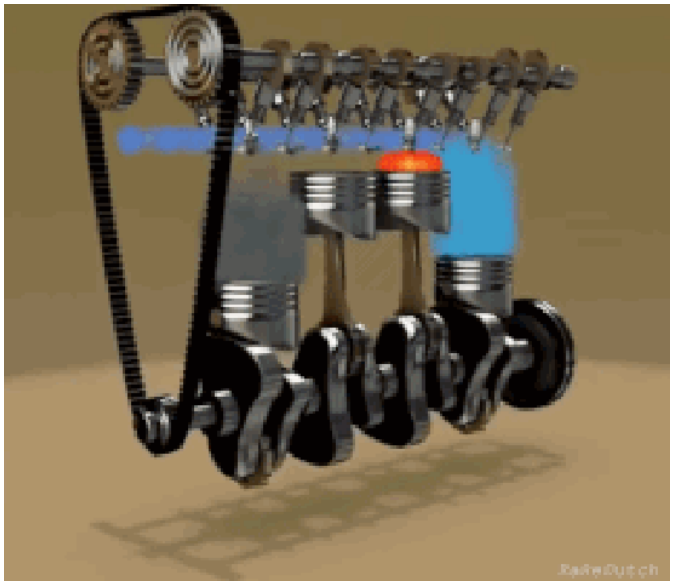


Figure:1.3.13: Image 13

Although they are just shapes and sounds, they symbolize an object or concept. A symbol is using a sound or visual image to stimulate meaning. For instance, when we see the classic red circle with the diagonal line in Image 14, we know it means “don’t do” something. Through our life experiences, we learn to associate meaning with certain sounds or shapes.



Figure:1.3.14: Image 14

The process of making those associations occurs only within the minds of the people involved; there is no such thing as truly "objective" meaning. Each of us attaches a meaning to a word that is unique to us; we each see language in our own individual way. The meanings we attach may be similar, but often those meanings can be dramatically different. Some words are far more concrete, and some are much more abstract.

Consider a word like “cat.” For most students reading this, they probably think of a four legged, feline creature that is typically kept as a pet, or, for those on farms, to kill rodents. Most of us probably picture something very similar; yet, we will also have differences. For those having a cat, perhaps they visualize their own cat. For those who like cats, they attach a positive connotation to the symbol; if they do not like cats, the connotation they attach may be far more negative. Nonetheless, since “cat” is so concrete, we have little room for misunderstanding.



Figure:1.3.15: Image 15

Compare “cat” to “fun.” Think of the many different ways people have fun. Fun is not something we can point to. Having fun is an internal sensation based on a personal judgement, so it is highly abstract. For many, going to a Friday night party is fun, but for some, such a social setting is very uncomfortable. There are many who derive a lot of fun from cleaning the bathroom, tending to a garden, or cooking complex meals, things others may see as sheer drudgery. Clearly, the opportunity for miscommunication when using abstract language is dramatically higher than when using concrete words.

Shared Meaning

In using these written or oral symbols, our goal is to **stimulate shared meaning** among the participants. Suzanne selects and sends symbols to Arlene, and she hopes Arlene will attach meaning very similar to what she intended. The ideal result is *what the speaker intends by her message and how the receiver interprets the message are highly similar*. Unfortunately, due to the complexity of this process, the likelihood of misunderstanding far outweighs the likelihood of true shared understanding.

Since we cannot directly transfer meaning from one person to another, we must use an interpretive process to attempt to stimulate meaning. This process has several stages, all of which offer opportunity for misunderstanding:

1. We select symbols that have a certain meaning for us based on our life experience.
2. We translate them into sounds and shapes.
3. We send them to the receiver.
4. The receiver sees or hears the shapes and sounds.
5. The receiver determines what discrete symbols they have seen or heard.
6. The receiver attaches meaning to those symbols based on their life experiences.

As a child, many have played the game, “telephone.” In this game, the children sit in a row, and the first child says something to the second child, who then shares it with the third child, and so on until it reaches the last child. Typically, the story the last child hears is quite different than the story as it began. Note each time it went from one child to another, the story was re-translated according to each child’s understanding of language. Just like the communication process, every time the message is translated it is changed, so misunderstandings are very common.

We are not, however, bound to stay lost in this sea of multiple interpretations. As we learn more about how communication functions, we learn to monitor and manage the process far more effectively.

Mutual Responsibility

The final aspect of the transactional model is the idea of **mutual responsibility**. In communication, *all participants have some responsibility for the success or failure of the communication*. The person speaking has a responsibility to send a clear, organized, understandable message; and the listener has a responsibility to attend to the message, interpret it, respond to it, and if they do not understand it, to ask for clarification. Even in public speaking situations where the speaker carries a larger burden of responsibility, the audience still shares responsibility for success. A classroom is a good example of this. No matter how well a teacher teaches, if a student simply refuses to try to understand the material, the teacher cannot force the student to learn. The student must meet the teacher "half way," so to speak.

Communication rarely works perfectly, but understanding it as a transactional, shared meaning–making process puts success within reach. Because messages are symbolic and filtered through experience, misinterpretations are common; that’s why all participants share responsibility for clarity. In practice, effective communicators set clear intent, favor concrete words when possible, attend to feedback and context, and verify understanding with brief check-ins (“So what I’m hearing is…”). By approaching every exchange as collaborative—listening actively, adapting to the other person, and inviting questions—we increase the overlap in meaning.

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1.4: The Purpose of Communication

Since communication is so complex, a reasonable question arises: Why do we do it? Evolutionary theory tells us instinctual behaviors exist to aid in the survival and perpetuation of the species. While the specific ways we communicate are culturally determined, the drive to communicate is an innate human trait. To understand the purposes of communication, we need to begin at a very basic level.

As discussed earlier, humans live in a stimulus-thought-response world, and we use communication as the tool to manage and respond to the world around us. By connecting with other humans, we can test and assess our perceptions, our thoughts about the stimuli, to determine if our responses to those thoughts are reasonable.
In using that tool, we fulfill several needs:

To make sense of the world around us

Since our actions are primarily based on how we think about the world around us, communication is the tool we use to develop, categorize, and modify these perceptions. We only have language because we have the ability to **abstract**, *to create mental images and symbols of the external world*. We can then talk about, think about, and generally manipulate our internal world to enhance our understanding of people, events, and experiences. In other words, language allows us to think.

As we process the world within our own minds (a form of intrapersonal communication), and as we interact with those around us (interpersonal communication), these internal images are tested, verified, and modified. Sharing our perceptions of the world with those around us is crucial in maintaining a sense of comfort and security that our view of the world is realistic and valid. While we do not seek this validation from everyone, we do seek it from our key reference groups. We want to know that we are seeing the world “accurately,” which actually means, “similarly to those important to me.”



Figure:1.4.17: Image 17

To maintain a healthy sense of self

Humans are inherently social creatures because we need acceptance and belongingness to feel we fit in and have worth to others. Interaction gives us a sense of how others see and value us, and as we gain a sense of value and importance from others, our sense of self-worth is validated or supported. For example, if Bev thinks her sense of humor is one of her good traits, and if others validate that perception by laughing at her jokes, her sense of self has been affirmed.

As mentioned earlier, we are not seeking acceptance from everyone; rather, we develop **reference groups**. *A reference group is a*

collection of individuals with whom acceptance and belongingness is very important (Hyman, 1942). We place high value on how they respond to us, and we strive to maintain good relationships and friendships with these individuals.



Figure:1.4.18: Image 18

To bind us socially

Communication also facilitates the building of relationships. In interpersonal communication, when we use the term “relationship,” we mean it differently than commonly used. Most often, students initially assume relationship means an exclusive relationship, like intimate partners. However, within this field, a relationship is *any* connection we have with *anyone*. We have a range of relationships, from the transient, such as with a clerk at a gas station, to the intimate connection of a spouse.

Regardless of the type, a relationship is nothing but how we communicate with that person; a relationship is defined and measured by the type of communication occurring. With acquaintances, we say very little, speak about limited topics for a limited time, and there is virtually never any sort of physical relationship, except perhaps a handshake. In intimate relationships, conversations tend to be longer and over a broader range of topics, and the level of physical contact may increase. We need these connections to maintain a sense of self and to fulfill our interpersonal needs, but we also need to maintain a sense of society, of connection with others we may not know well or count among our friends. Simple acts, such as saying "hello" to the checkout person at the grocery store, or commenting on the weather with a work colleague, keep us connected. We have all experienced individuals who seem to utterly ignore us, and we usually attribute highly negative labels to them, such as "stuck up," "conceited," or "pretentious." When Keith comes to the office in the morning, it is important he engages in the litany of "good mornings" and "hellos" with colleagues as it confirms his collegial connection. A simple hello, a wave, or a smile reaffirms our sense of all being connected to each other as members of the society.



Figure:1.4.19: Image 19

To share information and to influence others

As we connect socially, we naturally run into a range of ideas, interests, expertise, and goals. Instead of having to know everything, we can communicate with others to tap into the global, human knowledge base. In our highly connected world, we can share information instantaneously; no question need go unanswered.

Education is a prime example of the information sharing function of communication. Students attend school to gain information, ideas, and perspectives from others. Students learn from teachers and other students, and teachers learn from students. If we do not know how to do something, we ask someone, we search online, or we pay an expert to do it for us.

A unique ability of humans is that we can share information across generational lines. Alfred Korzybski, founder of the theory of General Semantics, referred to this as “time-binding:”

> Only humans have demonstrated the capability to build on the accumulated knowledge of prior generations. Korzybski referred to this capability as *time-binding* and declared it as the primary difference between humans and animals. Language and the symbolizing capabilities to record, document, and transmit information serves as the principle tool that facilitates time-binding (Institute of General Semantics, 2012b).

Humans have the unique ability to share information with those who lived before us and with those who will come after us. Oral histories have existed since the invention of language, and in some cultures the passing on of stories is of great cultural significance. With the advent of the printing press, we gained a tremendous ability to leave information for those who will come long after us. This ability to share information from generation to generation is why knowledge expands so rapidly; we learn from those before us, build on it, and then pass it on.

Not only can we exchange information, we can influence each other. We live immersed in persuasion on a variety of levels. The U.S. economic culture, and hence our whole American culture, thrives on one, simple persuasive act: advertising. Advertising encourages us to spend money, and it encourages us to spend that money in certain ways. In our democratic society, we use persuasion to influence local, state, and national policy. As a nation, we use our persuasive power to influence events worldwide.



Figure:1.4.20: Image 20

In addition to this broad, rather obvious use of persuasive messages, we also engage in interpersonal persuasion. With our friends we may argue about what movie to go see or where to dine. We may argue about sports teams, college, or politics. Without even realizing it, we influence our reference group members to see the world as we do, and they are doing the same to us. A simple conversation about whether a song is good or not, or whether a TV show is funny or not, is actually an interpersonal persuasion event.

We also experience **intrapersonal persuasion**, *persuasion within ourselves*. Using our abilities to think, made possible by language, we are continually weighing options and making decisions. In effect, we debate ourselves: "Should I buy it?", "Should I ask her out?", "Should I take English or Music?". We talk to ourselves in an ongoing, internal dialogue. In private, that internal dialogue may even be spoken. For example, while driving a car many of us will talk out a problem to help work through issues and make decisions. We find this intrapersonal communication helps us discern the best course of action. In effect, we engage in self-persuasion.

Communication is not optional—it is how humans survive, learn, and belong. Across everyday talk and inner self-talk, we use language and symbols to think clearly, test our perceptions with others, and reduce uncertainty. These exchanges help us build and maintain relationships, affirm a healthy sense of self within our reference groups, and knit communities together through simple social rituals. Communication also powers knowledge-sharing across generations and drives influence—from classroom discussions to public debate and advertising.

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1.5: Characteristics of Communication

We like to believe that if we choose the right words, clarity will follow. Yet communication is less a straight line than a crowded intersection—languages, emotions, cultures, ethics, intentions, and personalities all converging at once. General Semantics reminds us that misfires are the rule, not the exception, and that meaning is filtered through far more than vocabulary. In practice, our "communication package" speaks even when we don't: posture, tone, silence, and absence carry messages we never drafted. Below are some important characteristics of communication that invite us to be thoughtful about the challenges of competent communication.

Communication success is rare.

One of the core tenets of the theory of General Semantics is that due to the inherent complexity and interrelatedness of the components of the communication process, there is virtually always some factor inhibiting the success of communication (The Institute of General Semantics, 2012a). Those factors can range from blatant and overwhelming, such as the individuals not even speaking the same language, to more subtle and unnoticed, such as emotions that distort and alter the message being taken in. It is hard to imagine any sort of perfect communication. Granted, we all experience moments when we feel we truly connect with another person, and we feel we are able to share ideas and emotions in a very clear and pure manner; however, those wonderful moments are few and far between. This characteristic of communication emphasizes the need for us to listen carefully, speak clearly, and take time to make sure we really understand what the other is saying.

Communication occurs verbally and nonverbally.

We communicate using a **communication package**. Our communication package is *anything about us that has communication value*. That package is comprised of two major types of communication: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal communication consists of language (words, meaning, syntax, grammar), and nonverbal communication consists of non-language communication variables (vocal traits, gestures, posture, and many more). According to Albert Mehrabian (1981), in emotional expression, verbal communication is about 7% of our overall communication package, and nonverbal is about 93% of the overall package.

While we generally think of communication as speaking, most communication actually occurs without the use of language. Nonverbal is our primary form of communication. Consider how we use nonverbal traits to test if we believe a person is lying or not. They may say, "Nothing's wrong," but their body language and vocal factors may suggest they are deeply troubled. Due to the overwhelming influence of nonverbal, we virtually always see the nonverbal as a true expression of emotional state.

Communication is unavoidable.

A very famous communication theorist, Paul Watzlowick, coined the phrase, "One cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick, 1967). No matter how hard we may try, we are always communicating something. Obviously we can quit speaking, but we cannot stop the myriad of nonverbal messages being sent: silence communicates; absence communicates. We all know the "silent treatment" can be a very powerful tool to express displeasure. If a student skips class or work, their absence communicates a message to the instructor or supervisor. As soon as another person even thinks of us, some sort of message is being conveyed.

Due to this ongoing nature of communication, we are also sending a blend of **intentional** and **unintentional** messages. Intentional messages are *those sent deliberately and purposefully*, while unintentional messages are *those the sender is unaware of sending*. For example, before Mark goes to a job interview, he carefully considers what to wear, rehearses answers to common questions, and even selects a pen that he believes makes him look more professional. These are intentional choices Mark is making to attempt to communicate a specific message. Once at the job interview, however, Mark may fidget with his pen, not make strong eye contact, or repeatedly clear his throat, behaviors of which he is totally unaware. These unconscious behavors may be unintentional, but since they still carry communication value, the interviewer may see Mark as nervous and lacking confidence.

Communication has ethical implications.

Communication is a powerful tool. We know how easy it is to lie, and we have all heard of various scams that are based on lies.

How we choose to communicate to others or how we choose to present information has ethical considerations of which we must be aware. According to the National Communication Association Credo for Ethical Communication:

> Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate. Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live (NCA, 2012).

Ethics is a *set of standards to which we hold ourselves and others accountable*. For example, most would agree lying is wrong, yet we do it every day. Sarah receives a call from someone she does not wish to speak with, so what excuse does she give? Mandy says something Brandon disagrees with, but Brandon does not voice disagreement in order to avoid a conflict. An instructor asks how many have read the assignment, and Martin raises his hand even though he did not do it. Cynthia cannot find a source for a speech, so she makes one up; after all, who is really going to know? Communication is about choice, and some of those choices are inconsistent with an ethical approach to communication.

Communication is culturally specific.

Language varies from culture to culture. While this seems obvious when comparing Chinese to Somali to Arabic, it can also apply to the same language as used in different countries. English speakers travelling in other English-speaking countries quickly find words may be pronounced differently or have different meanings. Nonverbal communication also varies distinctly. A simple, non-threatening gesture in one culture could be the beginning of a severe conflict in another. As citizens in a highly-interconnected world in which people may move among a range of cultures, we should respect those communication variations and attempt to find ways to moderate and overcome those differences, focusing on creating connections, not exacerbating differences.

Remember too these differences can exist between co-cultures as well. Travelling around the United States we will quickly find communication differences. How the English language is used in Boston and New York is different than how it used in Alabama, or Minnesota. One of the most common topics used to illustrate these differences are words referencing soft drinks, such as Coca-Cola or Pepsi. In the Upper Midwest, “pop” is common, but other areas of the country have their own terms, such as “soft drink,” “soda,” or “coke.”

Communication reflects personality.

We make assumptions of what a person is like based on communication behaviors. In western cultures, we usually see outgoing people as having more eye contact, a more open posture, and generally a more expressive demeanor. Likewise, quiet or shy people may avoid eye contact, use a more closed posture, and keep emotional expression at a minimum. While we want to be careful in making these assumptions, nonetheless these are an inherent part of the perception process. As we learn cultural norms, we learn to associate behaviors with assumed personality traits. This set of assumptions aids us in making quick decisions about people and events, helping us manage the uncertainty of new encounters. The obvious danger is stereotyping, but as effective, self-reflexive communicators, we recognize this tendency and work to moderate its influence.

Communication rarely lands perfectly because meaning is filtered through language, emotion, context, and perception. We send messages as a whole package—words plus nonverbal cues—with nonverbal signals often carrying more weight in emotional exchange. Communication is also unavoidable: even silence and absence speak, and every interaction blends intentional choices with unintentional signals. Because messages can help or harm, ethical standards—truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, and respect—must guide how we speak and how we present information. Culture and co-cultures shape both language and nonverbal norms, so effective communicators approach differences with curiosity rather than assumption. Finally, we read personality from communication behaviors, which can aid quick judgments but also invites stereotyping; mindful self-reflection helps us check those shortcuts. Taken together, these principles call us to listen carefully, speak clearly, and verify understanding to reduce distortion and build genuine connection.

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1.6: Communication Competence

Communication is only meaningful if the message we are sending is received and decoded as we intend. Getting a message across is much more complicated than just saying something however we want, and having it understood. **Communication competence** is defined as the ability to craft and send a message in a manner that ensures it will be received as it was intended and in a way that maintains healthy relationships. According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1984; 2011), competent communication involves a number of key components.

Clarity and Intent

Achieving competent communication begins with the **intent** behind our message. Every communication has some intended response by others, even when we intend others to ignore us. Being conscious of the intent of our messages- particularly those messages we send to more than one person at a time- can go a long way to helping us craft the message in a successful way.

Crafting a message in as **clear** a manner as possible is the most common route to having it received successfully. In academic terms, clarity means adjusting our verbal or nonverbal signals to suit the channel that we choose, and with consideration to the possible noise that could confuse the recipient. In many cases, our decisions about clarity are guided by what we view to be **appropriate** ways of communicating in the context. This involves suiting our language and behavior to the expectations of others.



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Adaptability

We have all experienced miscommunications when our intended meaning was misunderstood by someone else. To communicate competently means to avoid misunderstandings by purposefully suiting the message in both content and delivery. To do this requires that we constantly adapt our communication depending on who we are communicating with, what the message is that we have to convey, and what channel we are using to convey it.

The ability to adapt our communication is perhaps the most important skill for good communication. **Adaptability** is crucial to achieving communication competency because not all people interpret the same messages in the same way. Adapting our communication can mean many things--we may need to adapt our tone, the vocabulary we use, the way we behave physically, even the amount we communicate. This is because communication is always interpreted based on its context, and these contexts can change depending on a number of factors.

Self-Monitoring

One way to improve our ability to adapt our communication is to begin by improving our own self-monitoring. **Self-monitoring** is the ability to understand one's own behaviors at both the macro and micro levels, and to understand how they may be interpreted by others. The key to strong self-monitoring is to be **empathetic**. This means being attentive to other's feelings, and trying to see things from their point of view. If you can develop your empathy for others it is likely you will be better able to accurately anticipate how your own behaviors may affect them, making it easier for you to self-monitor, and to thereby adapt your communication.

Competent communicators usually monitor their behaviors in order to convey to their conversation partners the same qualities in a listener that they too are seeking when they communicate. This is called **conversational involvement**, and it requires that we maintain eye contact, use verbal and non-verbal cues that signal interest and/or understanding, and focus our attention adequately.

In order to behave appropriately, a competent communicator will also use **conversational management** as a way of regulating the conversation. Regulating conversations is almost intuitive to most of us, but competent communicators make it a point to do things like take turns without interrupting, respond when responses are expected, and to include everyone present. This can be complicated because in most circumstances no one person is assigned the manager of a conversation, but we all play our part in the management of conversations if we want to be seen as polite.

Cognitive Complexity

People who are skilled in competent communication demonstrate what is known as cognitive complexity. **Cognitive complexity** is a measure of one's ability to see things from multiple viewpoints. A person with well-developed cognitive complexity is likely to consider a range of factors when analyzing an interaction between two people, and to make a point of contextualizing each message sent with regard to the viewpoint of the person of the sender, and then to contextualize its reception from the viewpoint of the receiver. Because communication takes place across cultural, subcultural, and even co-cultural lines it is helpful to consider that each individual person sees the world from their own particular standpoint (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; 2011).



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Standpoint Theory

Standpoint Theory argues that each of us occupies a specific social location (or standpoint) in the societies where we live, and it is from this standpoint that we experience the world, and thereby understand it. Different standpoints can occasionally be shared by people, but more often than not we are communicating with people who see the world from a different standpoint than our own (Wood, 2005). Recognizing the variety of different standpoints that people occupy is easier to understand when we first acknowledge that each of us sees the world through the framework of our own intersectional identity. The concept of

intersectionality states that no one identity factor- age, race, gender, religion- accounts entirely for our identity. Therefore, when we aim to adopt the viewpoints of other people we must do so by recognizing that they too enjoy an intersectional identity (hooks, 2014).

Sender-based versus receiver-based communication

We naturally tend to be **egocentric,** *assuming others think as we do, use language as we do, and generally see the world as we do*. Since the only head we live in is our own, it is the only actual experience we have; we cannot live as another person. This, however, leads to a problem.

Sender-based communication occurs *when the sender acts in an egocentric manner, assuming the way they communicate is appropriate for everyone*. A sender-based person firmly believes others see the world and think as they do. As a result, they see no need to adapt to others; after all, why change what is correct to begin with? This person will assume that once something is said, it is communicated; any failure in communication is the fault of the other person. A sender-based listener assumes how they interpret the message is how the sender intended it, not allowing for misinterpretation or misunderstandings. It is a very absolute, self-centered, and non-adaptive approach to communication.

Receiver-based communication occurs when the sender acts in a **provisional** manner, *assuming they need to consider how best to communicate this specific message to this specific person or to this audience*. They realize what works for one person or situation may not work for another. They know language interpretation varies depending on a receiver's standpoint, and concepts may have to be presented in a variety of ways depending on the receiver. Like everyone, they initially interpret the message egocentrically, but they then take a second step and ask, “Is this what the speaker intended?” They realize misunderstandings and misinterpretations are typical, and they work to offset those from the beginning.

Receiver-based communication does not restrict us from what we want to communicate; rather, it guides us to think of our receiver and then package that message in the most effective manner. We have all seen adults who seem to have no ability to talk to children; they do not know how to adapt their language to a child. A sender-based communicator has far more difficulty initiating and maintaining a range of relationships. Receiver-based communicators can move among a broader range of relationships, adapting to diversity far more effectively. As we work to improve the quality of our communication, this ability to ask, “What about the receiver?” is key. By shifting focus from ourselves to the other, we increase our ability to form messages more likely to lead to higher quality communication.



Figure 1.6.1: Copy and Paste Caption here. (Photo by Vitaly Gariev on Unsplash)

Even the most basic communicative acts are far more nuanced and complex than we might realize when we perform them. Communication is not only contextual, but it demands that processes of encoding and decoding that can be complicated by the way that messages are relayed, and/or received. In order to enhance our communication, we must become more thoughtful about other people, more attentive to our own communication behaviors, and how they need to be adapted to the unique circumstances of our varied interactions with other people.

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1.7: Chapter 1 Summary

Introduction to Communication Review

At a glance: Why study communication?

- Communication Studies isn't just public speaking—it's about how we speak (oral) and listen (aural) to connect, collaborate, inform, and persuade across settings.
- It builds soft skills that employers want: teamwork, problem-solving, verbal communication, planning, information handling, and persuasion.

Four communication settings

- Interpersonal (one-with-one or few): Everyday conversations that build relationships and reduce uncertainty; driven by needs for belongingness and acceptance.
- Small Group (several-among-several): Teams working toward a task/decision; participation and inclusion boost effectiveness.
- Public Speaking (one-to-many): Primarily sender-to-audience; the speaker carries greater responsibility; audience provides feedback (questions, expressions, applause).
- Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC): Messages via tech (text, email, social media, video). Powerful for connection and social change; brings benefits (reach, efficiency) and challenges (distraction, echo chambers).

The communication process (key idea)

- Definition: Communication is the transactional process of using symbolic language to stimulate shared meaning.
- Models:
  - Linear: One-way; too narrow.
  - Circular (interaction): Adds feedback; can be too broad.
  - Transactional: Multiple messages flow simultaneously; some are feedback, some independent; meaning is co-created.
- Symbolic language: Words/symbols stand for ideas.
- Shared meaning: For understanding, conversants must agree on the shared meaning of the symbols.
- Mutual responsibility: Responsibility for clear communication falls on both the sender and receiver.

Why we communicate (purposes)

- Make sense of the world (think, label, and test perceptions).
- Maintain a healthy sense of self (validation from reference groups).
- Bind us socially (build and maintain relationships).
- Share information and influence others (education, advertising, civic life, interpersonal and intrapersonal persuasion).
- Survive and adapt (reduce uncertainty; coordinate action).

Characteristics of communication

- Success is rare: Many points for breakdown—so we check for understanding.
- Verbal and nonverbal: Nonverbal heavily shapes meaning, especially for emotions.
- Continuous: You cannot not communicate; messages can be intentional or unintentional.
- Ethical: Choices matter—aim for truthfulness, fairness, respect (NCA Credo).
- Culturally specific: Language and nonverbal cues vary by culture and co-culture.
- Reflects personality: We infer traits from behaviors—use caution to avoid stereotyping.

Communication competence (what “good” looks like)

- Clarity and intent: Know your goal; tailor language to channel and noise; be appropriate to context.
- Adaptability: Adjust tone, words, nonverbal, and channel to audience and culture.
- Self-monitoring and empathy: Track how you come across; show conversational involvement (eye contact, nods, brief verbal cues); and manage turns.
- Cognitive complexity: See multiple perspectives; consider both sender and receiver standpoints; recognize intersectional identities.
- Receiver-based mindset: Ask “What will work for this audience?” rather than assuming your default style fits all.

Quick self-check

- Can you name and define the four settings?
- Can you explain why the transactional model improves on linear and circular?
- Can you list at least three purposes of communication?
- Can you name two characteristics of communication and give an example?
- Can you describe two habits of a competent communicator you will practice this week?

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2: SOCIAL PERCEPTION

2.1: Introduction to Social Perception
2.2: The Perception Process
2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self
2.4: Improving Perception
2.5: Chapter 2 Summary

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2.1: Introduction to Social Perception

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. describe the three stages of the perception process.
2. explain how self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy shape self-presentation.
3. evaluate how cultural schemas and social pressures influence interpersonal judgments.
4. apply perception-checking.

In looking at the basics of communication theory, we know humans live in a *stimulus-thought-response* world. We do not experience the world directly. We sense and then think about external experiences. Our senses are stimulated by things we see, hear, touch, taste, or smell, and then our brains sort through our accumulated store of knowledge to determine what it is. As a result, our perception of what we have seen/heard/touched/tasted/smelled is our interpretation of events. We respond to the interpretation of the events, not to the stimuli directly. Understanding this process of abstraction, of converting reality into thought, aids us in managing communication more effectively.

Perception is *a process by which we create mental images of the world around us*, the world "out there." Perceptions determine communication choices, so understanding this process helps us to avoid common perceptual problems. We gain greater insight into how there can be multiple, equally valid perceptions of the same stimuli, increasing our ability to respect a range of diverse views. A significant implication of this understanding is it reveals how much responsibility we receiver-based communicators have in the success or failure of an event. We have to be responsible for those perceptions.

Human beings are natural-born pattern-seekers. In his book, *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies*, Michael Shermer describes this drive as **patternicity**. He states, "Our *brains are belief engines*, *evolved pattern-recognition machines that connect the dots and create meaning out of the patterns we think we see in nature*" (2011, p. 66). This drive to find patterns is far more than just understanding the world; for primitive peoples, it was a key survival skill. Shermer explains that with such discernment, "we have learned something valuable about the environment from which we can make predictions that aid in survival and reproduction. We are descendants of those who were most successful at finding patterns"(2011, p. 66).

Understanding perception is crucial for effective communication because we need to accept we cannot truly "experience" another person. We cannot feel what they feel, think what they think, or know what they know. All we can do is take in our sensory observations and draw conclusions about what we think they are like. Remember, humans sense-think-respond, so when we interact we are making communication choices based what is in our head, not directly with the person themselves.

As illustrated in Figure 2.1.1, during an interaction between two people, six perceptions are used to make communication choices.

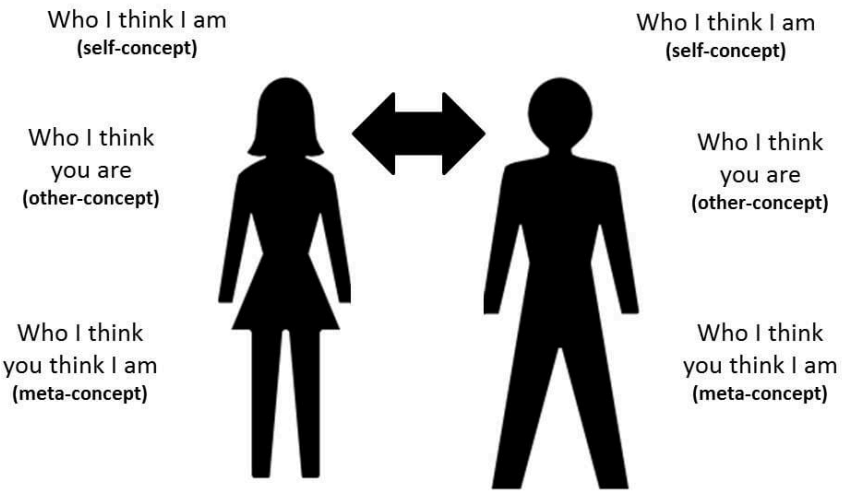


Figure 2.1.1: Image 1

First, our **self-concept** or *how we view ourselves*, impacts how we communicate. If Jamal sees himself as interesting and outgoing, he is far more likely to initiate conversations, share personal information, and generally engage other people more easily and comfortably. If Darrin believes he is not very interesting, he is far less likely to engage in such conversations. People who are more optimistic and look for the positives of situations will communicate differently than those who are more pessimistic and look for the negatives of situations. Our communication choices are driven, in part, by how we perceive ourselves.

Second, we choose how to communicate based on our **other-concept**, which is *our perception of the other person*. If Jordan believes Alex is unlikely to understand the jargon she is tempted to use, she will select other, less technical language to get her point across. Dealing with children is an excellent example of how other-concepts guide us: we know we must speak differently to children than to adults, so we adapt our language, communication style, topic selection, and other variables to fit the other person.

Third, we all engage in some degree of **impression management**; *an attempt to influence how others perceive us*. Since we cannot read each other's minds and really know what we think of each other, the most we can do is use our perceptual skills to create an image of how it appears we are perceiving each other. This is our **meta-concept**. We all have significant people and groups with whom acceptance and belongingness are important, and, as a result, *we monitor how those people are responding to us and use those clues to create an image of how we believe they are thinking of us*. If Jake is hanging out with a reference group of male friends, and they are laughing at his jokes and responding to his comments, he probably feels good about his meta-concept and will continue to use those same behaviors. On the other hand, if Jake feels ignored and not engaged or valued, he will likely alter what he is doing to get a more favorable response.



Figure 2.1.2: Image 2

Consider a couple going on a date. Each of them may think carefully and plan thoughtfully what they are going to wear, do, and say. Looking for feedback from the other that the date is going well, Taylor may do or say things to elicit a favorable response, and her partner, Chris, will do likewise. They are making communication choices based on how they believe they are being perceived by the other. Taylor and Chris are making choices based on their meta-concepts.

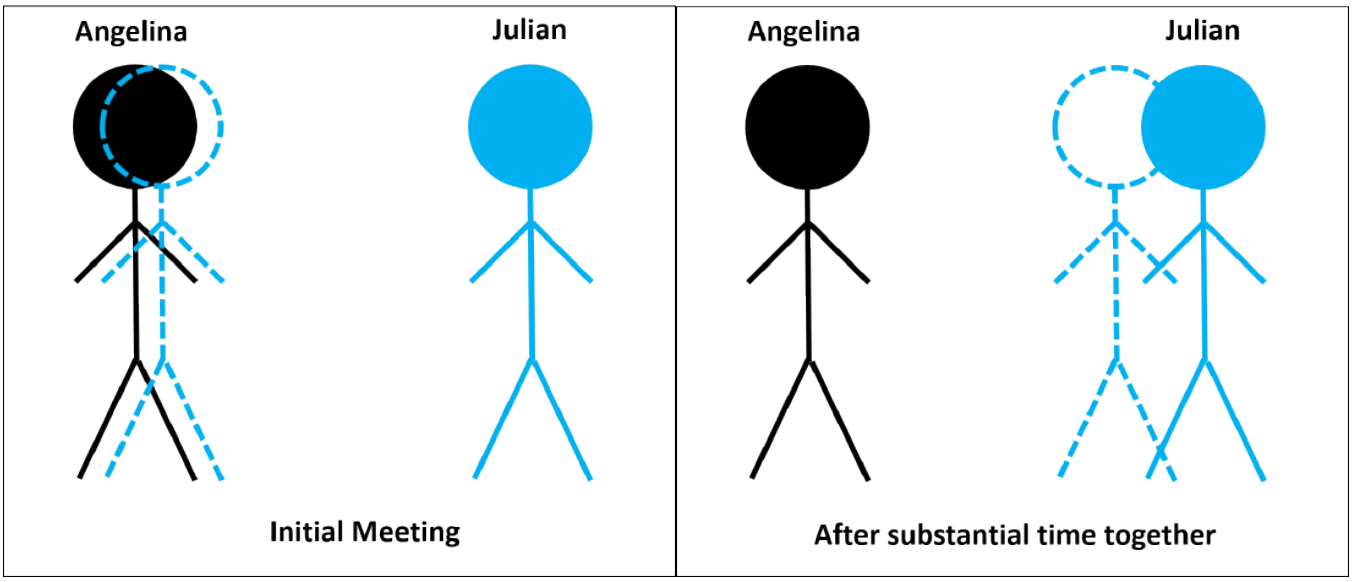


Figure 2.1.4: Image 4

When we decide what to say or how to say it, we make decisions based on our perception of who we *think* they are, not who they *really* are.

Compare the two images above. In the first image, when first meeting, Angelina has very little information about Julian; she does not know him yet. As a result, Angelina's other-concept of Julian (represented by the blue, dashed figure), is heavily based on Angelina's assumptions about Julian. But as they get to know each other and Angelina observes Julian's traits, her other-concept moves closer to the reality of Julian's personality (second image). Since it is now based in direct experience, the image becomes a more accurate perception of Julian. As we get to know others, our other-concepts and meta-concepts become more accurate and well-tested. However, no matter how well we know someone, we cannot experience the world directly from their perspective; we can only operate on our own perceptions.

In conclusion, human communication operates in a sense–think–respond cycle: we don't react to raw stimuli but to our interpretations of what we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Perception is the process of building mental models of the "world out there," which guide our communication choices and explain why multiple, equally valid views can arise from the same event. As natural pattern-seekers (patternicity), our brains connect dots to reduce uncertainty, which helps us function but can also introduce bias. In any interaction, six perceptions shape behavior: my self-concept, my view of you (other-concept), and how I think you see me (meta-concept)—and the same three on your side. We continually manage impressions and update these perceptions with experience; early assumptions should be treated as hypotheses. Because we act on our interpretations, effective communicators take responsibility for testing and refining their perceptions rather than assuming they directly reflect reality.

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2.2: The Perception Process

The perception process has three stages: sensory stimulation and selection, organization, and interpretation. Although we are rarely conscious of going through these stages distinctly, they nonetheless determine how we develop images of the world around us.

Stage 1: Sensory Stimulation and Selection

Sensory stimulation is self defining: *our senses are bombarded by stimuli*. We hear, touch, taste, see, or smell something. The neurological receptors associated with these senses are stimulated, and this stimuli races to the brain for processing. However, there is a problem.

We cannot attend to all the stimuli we experience. Given the sheer quantity of sensory stimulation, we cannot pay attention to all of it. We must engage in **sensory selection**. Sensory selection is *the process of determining which stimulus gets our attention and which stimuli we ignore*. As with the rest of the perception process, rarely are we aware of this "weeding" process occurring, yet we must manage the sensory load.



Figure 2.2.1: Image 1

An example of sensory selection is the "cocktail party effect." When we attend a crowded party, with numerous conversations happening at once, we cannot adequately attend to several conversations simultaneously. Instead, we tune out extraneous sounds in favor of the person we wish to attend to. We select the most important stimuli to attend to, and we eliminate the rest (Hamilton, 2013). Another, somewhat unusual example, is clothing. Rarely are we very aware of how our clothes feel touching our bodies, yet there are countless sensory receptors being stimulated. Since the feel of our clothing is not typically very important, we simply ignore it. Yet if we change the situation, such as trying on a new pair of jeans to see if it they fit, we become much more aware of how those clothes feel. In effect, when trying on clothes prior to purchasing them, we are trying to determine if they are comfortable enough so we can weed out the stimuli of wearing them. So "comfortable" means, "I can ignore how they feel." Wearing formal attire for a wedding, we may notice how odd the suit or the dress feels in comparison to our typical, daily attire. Because the situation has changed, it is more difficult to weed out the stimuli.

As we experience a flood of stimuli, four factors influence what we pay attention to and what we ignore:

1. Needs

We pay far more attention to things which fill a need or requirement. When hungry, we are far more likely to notice places to eat. If we are not hungry, the restaurants, snack bars, and delicatessens are still there, but we do not pay attention to them as they are not meaningful to us *at that time*. If we need to get somewhere in a hurry, we become very conscious of slower drivers, stoplights,

or other such hindrances we might otherwise ignore. All needs have an ebb and flow to it; as need rises, attention rises, but as needs are fulfilled, attention ebbs.

The same dynamic works with people. The need for acceptance may drive us to focus more on signals affirming acceptance or signals indicating a threat to that acceptance. Early in a relationship, partners tend to be highly tuned into each other for this reason; monitoring clues indicating the status of the relationship. If Marcus feels his relationship with Aliyah is uncertain, he will look for clues suggesting trouble or instability. His needs for acceptance and belongingness are being threatened, so his perceptions of relevant stimuli is heightened.

2. Interests

We pay far more attention to those things we enjoy. Scanning channels on television is a good illustration of this process. We click through numerous channels quite rapidly until something catches our interest. We pause on a channel for a moment, and if the interest continues, we quit changing channels; if not, we continue the search. As we speak face-to-face, we tune in and out of conversations as the topics change. A conversation about a football game may not hold our interest, but a conversation about music may pull us in. A young man infatuated with a young woman will be highly attuned to any signal of interest from her, while comments from a casual friend may be ignored.

Interest also allows us to perceive more detail in those things we experience. Intense football fans will see details of play development and strategy casual fans may not recognize. The higher interest in the game leads the fan to learn more, and the more the fan learns, the more the fan can perceive. This cycle applies in all facets of our lives. There are people who can discern every spice in a dish simply by tasting; there are musicians who can identify every instrument in a piece of music just by listening. As our knowledge of effective communication rises, we will be better attuned to the dynamics occurring in a given communication situation, so we will be able to more precisely identify what is or is not working.

3. Expectations

We pay more attention to those things we believe we are supposed to experience. There are two sides to this dynamic. On one hand, if we believe we will experience something, we are more likely to focus on the stimuli fulfilling that expectation and ignore contrary input. Prior to traveling to a new place, if George convinces his best friend Josh, Cleveland is a very dirty city, he will likely “see” a lot of evidence fulfilling that expectation. If Mariana's friend convinces her a certain college is a real party school, she is more likely to see confirming evidence when visiting the dorms.

If we expect to not experience something, we are less likely to “see” it. We do not expect our friends to treat us poorly, so we are less likely to notice behaviors others might consider rude or insensitive. The desire for affection and acceptance can often blind us to such things. A young man may not realize his girlfriend is taking advantage of him because he expects she would not treat him badly, even if his friends are trying to get him to see what is really going on. He does not expect to see evidence of her poor treatment so he, in effect, blinds himself to certain stimuli.

4. Physiological Limitations

Physiological limitations refer to basic sensory limitations; one or more of our senses is limited as to how well it will function. For those who wear glasses, the world is blurred without corrective lenses; what they can sense is very limited by a physical problem. Hearing losses, diminishment of taste and smell, and loss of touch sensitivity can all cause us to have limits on what we can experience.

Many who have extreme physiological limitations often compensate by using other senses in a heightened manner. A man who is blind may attend to sounds at a much higher level than a sighted person, using those sounds as a mechanism for discerning his environment. A woman who is deaf may attend to visual cues at a much higher level than a hearing person for the same reason.

Stage 2: Organization

Once our senses have been stimulated, we move to the second stage of perception, **organization**. Organization is *the process of taking the stimuli and putting it into some pattern we can recognize*. As an analogy, when we come home from the grocery story with several bags, we sort those bags into the appropriate cabinets, organizing the items so their placement makes sense for later use.

How we understand this process of organization comes from **Gestalt theory**. Gestalt is German for “pattern” or “shape,” and the theories address how we translate external stimuli into mental images. Developed in the early 20th century, Gestalt theory states *how we process stimuli is a complex process blending external stimuli with internal processes* (Rock & Palmer, 1990). In other words, how we perceive the external world is heavily determined by internal influences.

There are four variables affecting how we organize the stimuli we encounter:

1. Patterns

Patterns are pre-existing "templates" we use to order stimuli. These are ways of organizing the stimuli that we have learned and carry with us. As children we are taught basic shapes, like "square," "triangle," and "circle," so when we experience a stimulus fitting those templates, we can make sense of what we see. Parents teach children what it means to be "rude" or "nice," so we learn to make sense of behavior by using these learned templates.



Figure 2.2.3: Image 3

Consider Image 3. Most U.S. students will see patterns for each of the top three strings of numbers. The top one fits a standard telephone number for us in the U.S. The next fits the number pattern for a U.S. Social Security number, and the third fits the pattern for a credit card number. The last two, however, may be not be immediately apparent, yet they are commonly recognized patterns in other parts of the world. One is a Costa Rican phone number and a Scottish phone number. Of course, unless we have these templates already in place from our past experiences, we would not discern those patterns. Only because of the templates we have learned will we see these patterns, otherwise they would be just a list of random numbers.

We are always expanding our storehouse of templates. Every time we learn something new, we have created new ways of organizing stimuli. As we learn new words, each word is a new template for that set of sounds or visual shapes. As discussed with sensory stimulation, the more of an interest we have in something, the more we learn about it, so that means we learn more and more patterns for that subject. Thus, when we experience something in an area of interest, we can discern more detail as we have more patterns to apply.

2. Proximity

Proximity refers to *how we see one object in relation to what is around it*. We do not just see a person; we see the person within their surroundings which affects our interpretation of that person. A specific dynamic of proximity is the **figure-ground relationship**. The figure-ground relationship posits that *as our focus on the object (the figure) and the background (the surroundings) change, interpretation changes*.

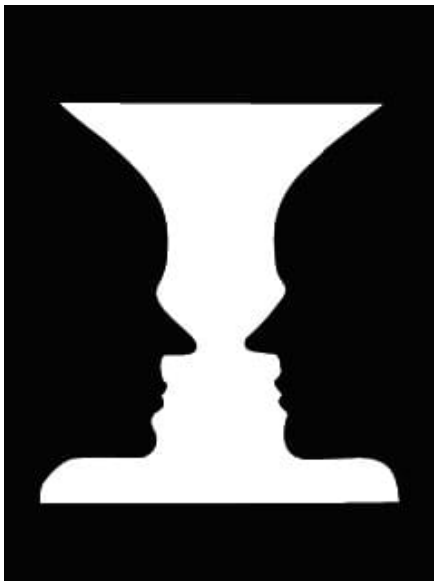


Figure 2.2.5: Image 5

In the classic faces/vase image (Image 5), whether we focus on the background or the figure alters our interpretation. By focusing on the black background, most see the outlines of two faces in profile; by focusing on the white figure, most see a vase. When we shift our focus between the figure and background, our perception changes.

In applying the concept of figure-ground to people, consider professors. Seeing a professor on campus is unremarkable; we think little of it. If, however, we see them late at night coming out of a bar with a questionable reputation, our perception may be altered based on seeing them in that background. Politicians are very aware of this dynamic, avoiding backgrounds that may cause problems. A politician does not want to be seen in a strip club but does want to be seen in church.



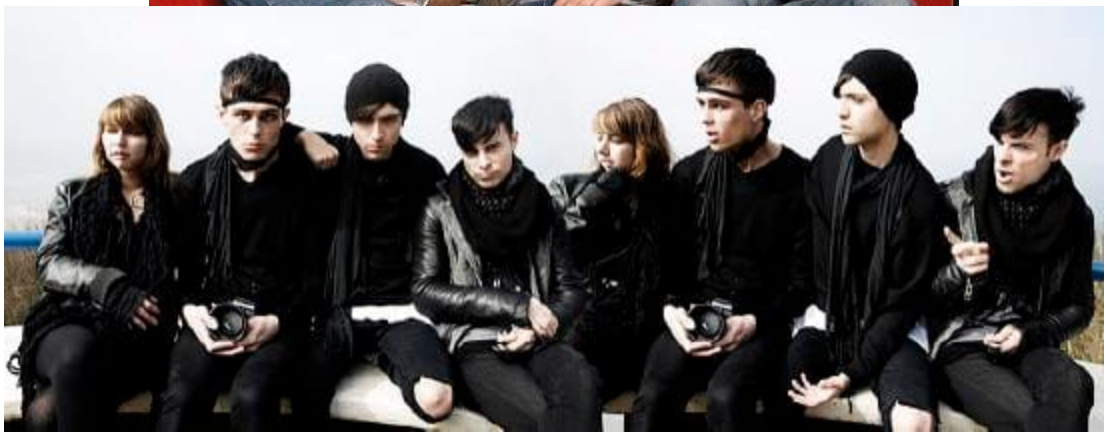


Figure 2.2.7: Image 7



Figure 2.2.8: Image 8

Another aspect of proximity is **grouping**. We tend to *assign similar traits and characteristics to items that are grouped together*. Looking at the groups in Images 6, 7, and 8, most will assume each person in the group shares traits with the others in the group. They look similar and they are physically close to each other. We assume these similarities even though we know nothing about

the personality traits of the individuals

3. Simplicity

As we now know, we are driven to lower uncertainty and make sense of the world around us. In lowering uncertainty, we tend to favor the easiest, least confusing perception of a person or event; we like simple perceptions. First impressions are so powerful because once we have created an initial perception, it is far simpler to keep it than change it. It is hard for us to change our perceptions because changing our minds causes complexity, and the drive for simplicity is a powerful, countering force.

While a normal process, this drive for simplicity can be dangerous. We can be guilty of oversimplifying complex issues. This drive to simplicity affects how we perceive individuals. The power of stereotyping is simplicity. **Stereotypes** are *generalizations about a group of people categorized by an external marker, like sex, and skin color*. Having one way of looking at an entire group is much simpler than treating each member of that group as an individual with a unique personality. It is far simpler to assume that "all blonds are dumb" or "all students are lazy" than to let each individual blond or each individual student emerge as a unique person. Individual perception takes time and effort; group stereotyping is easy. Stereotyping is a simplistic way of perceiving the world around us.

We can see this simplicity at work in popular culture with something called **type-casting**. In selecting actors for a TV show or movie, it is common that stereotypes come into play. *Actors are often cast on their ability to reflect stereotypical representations of different character types*. We see portrayals of Arabs as either oil billionaires or terrorists; or in the news about a natural disaster in Mexico, the locals are shown as patient and passive, and in need of help from America. African American women used to be portrayed as domestics but now are more likely to be seen in the background as a homeless person, a prostitute, or an angry black woman. Asian Americans are shown as academically gifted or as without friends, and not much else. Caucasions do not escape the broad brush of stereotypes in the media; they may be likewise type cast as the clueless father, the dizzy, frantic mother, or the spoiled child. As these stereotypes fill our televisions and stream to our electronic devices, they reinforce the existence of the stereotype in a powerful cycle.

4. Closure

Closure is the psychological drive for completeness. Again, with our powerful need to lower uncertainty, it is much more comfortable to perceive a whole, complete picture than partial images that do not seem to make sense. As a result, we will fill in missing stimuli to make the incomplete appear whole.

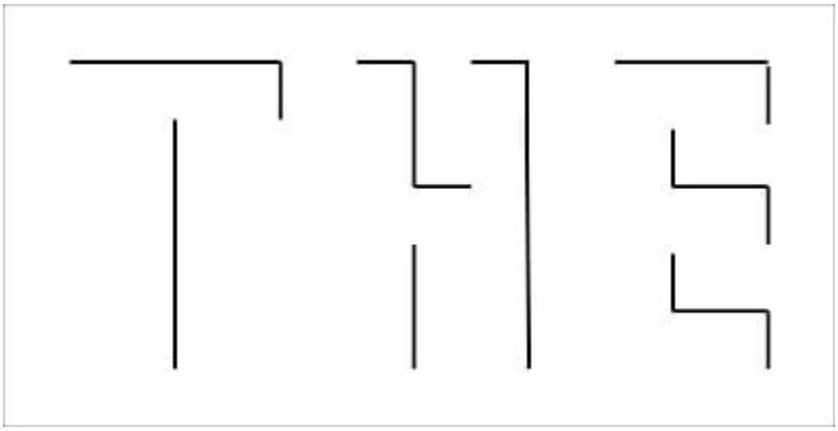


Figure 2.2.9: Image 9

While Image 9 may look like the word THE, note that the letters T, H, and E are not fully present. Instead, due to the proximity of the lines to each other, it is simpler to imagine the missing lines to see a whole word than leaving it as a collection of unrelated lines. In fact, in years of using this example, native English-speaking students always see the word THE. In applying this to people, if a friend does or says something unusual, we will create an explanation that at least temporarily explains what happened. It may not be correct, but being right is not as important as lowering uncertainty. For example, Ashley, whom we think is very open-minded, tells a racist joke. This creates uncertainty in us as it is so out-of-character for Ashley. We will try to determine why she did such a thing, trying to make sense of the inconsistent behavior. We may think, "She didn't realize how racist that is," or "She's being sarcastic." Until we can ask Ashley directly, we rely on these assumptions to explain the inconsistency and lower the uncertainty.

Engaging in closure, while perfectly natural, also can be dangerous. For some, once they fill in the missing information, they will take it as fact, not supposition. Their assumption becomes a false reality. The number of interpersonal conflicts caused by what we assume about the other is staggering.

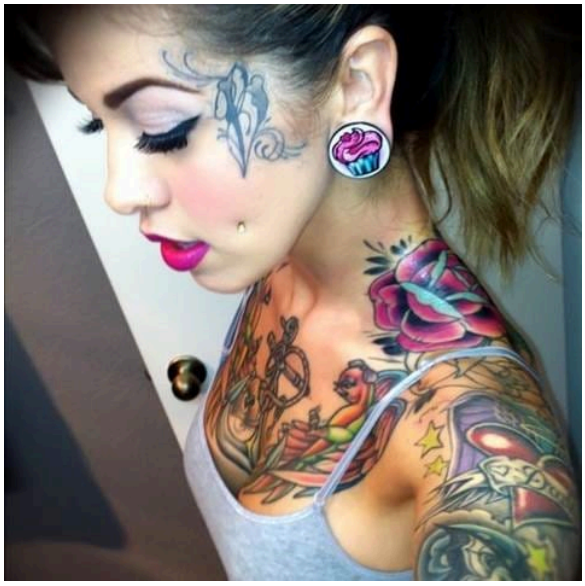


Figure 2.2.10: Image 10

Consider Image 10, what might most assume about this person? Although we know virtually nothing about her, other than what we see in front of us, we immediately have a list of assumptions about this person. And in today's digital world, we cannot even be confident the image is real, as the photograph may be heavily manipulated.

When we use closure, we assume our internal beliefs are true about external stimuli, and the probability of error is very high. While closure can give us temporary satisfaction, we need to be receiver-based and realize our assumptions can be wrong and must be tested for accuracy. As the reality of the situation emerges, we then alter our perception of the event.

Stage 3: Interpretation

After sensing the stimuli and organizing it into something recognizable, we attach a label; we interpret it. The **interpretation stage** is *where we make sense of what we have experienced; we determine what it means to us*. From the communication model, we know how we interpret input is determined by our field of experience; we learn how to see the world. There are a number of processes impacting how we interpret the stimuli.

1. Implicit Personality Theories

In 1954, psychologists introduced the concept of implicit personality theories, suggesting that *we do not learn a person's traits one at a time; rather, we see them in "groups"* (Schneider, 2004, p. 173). Social Psychologist Solomon Asch found that the presence of one trait led people to assume the presence of other traits (McLeod, 2008). When we see one trait, such as gender, we make all sorts of assumptions as what the person is like; we assume the presence of trait A implies the presence of traits B, C, D, and so on. Two types of implicit personality theories are the halo effect and stereotyping.

The **halo effect** is *our belief that traits tend to cluster, that traits "naturally" appear in groups*. We tend to assume certain traits just normally go together; once we experience one trait, we assume other traits just fall into place: "It is the idea that global evaluations about a person (e.g. she is likeable) bleed over into judgments about their specific traits (e.g. she is intelligent)" (Psyblog, 2007). This is most noticeable with attractiveness. As Asch discovered, we tend to assume those we see as "attractive" have multiple, positive traits, whether we have directly experienced them or not, and for those we find unattractive, we tend to assume multiple, negative traits. Obviously, our perceptions could be very far off in such a process. Remember the influence of expectations on sensory selection; we are more likely to see what we expect to see. Considering the influence of simplicity, it is far simpler to cluster traits than to allow for a rich diversity of personality types. As a result of these perceptual influences, this tendency to cluster traits is quite strong and can be challenging to counter.

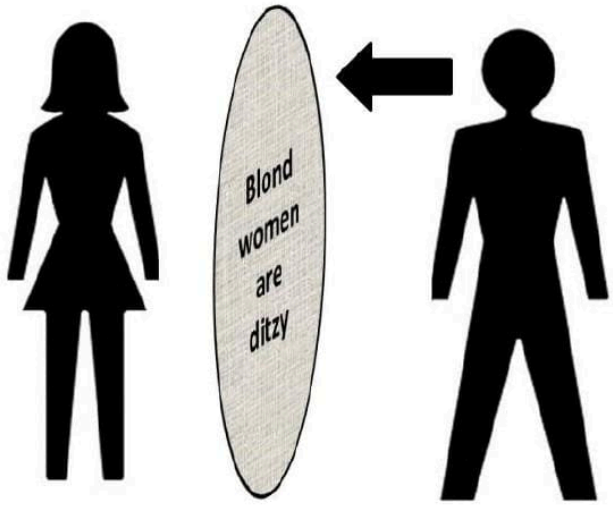


Figure 2.2.11: Image 11

Stereotyping is a more extreme type of implicit personality theory. While the halo effect links traits to each other, stereotyping links traits to people. Stereotyping is *the association of traits with a group of people usually categorized by an external marker*. We group people most often by some trait we can observe, such as gender, race, skin color, weight, height, or hair color, and then, we *assume* what we think is true of that group is true of each individual. If Doug believes the stereotype, “All blond females are dumb,” he is using two external markers, “blond,” and “female.” When he sees a blond female, he assumes she is dumb regardless of what she is really like. Doug sees two traits, and then he assumes other traits based on those external markers. Our assumptions dictate what a person is like rather than drawing our image of them from actual experience. As illustrated in image 11, stereotypes place themselves between us and the other person, severely distorting our perception of the other.

The danger with stereotyping is believing and acting as if our stereotype is true, regardless of actual, direct experience. A frequent complaint of people of color is being treated with suspicion in stores. “Shopping While Black” refers to experiencing discriminatory behaviors while shopping, such as being followed, not being helped, or being erroneously accused of shoplifting (Williams, Henderson, & Harris, 2001).

2. Assumed Similarity/Assumed Dissimilarity

When first meeting people, we make a very quick assessment of how similar or different we are. We see similarities or differences in gender, age, body size, demeanor, dress and other such superficial features. If Megan's initial assessment is that she is similar to Lindsey, she will assume they share many traits beyond these; Megan assumes similarity. If her initial assessment is they are different, Megan will assume what is true of her is *not* true of the other; she assumes dissimilarity. It is important to emphasize that these are still our internal assumptions based on very limited information, and that we may very well be wrong in our perceptions.

Assumed similarity/dissimilarity is quite noticeable in attraction. Juan sees a girl, Magdalena, to whom he is quite attracted. In an effort to connect with her, Juan will focus on what he and Magdalena have in common, even if it means ignoring obvious differences. Juan assumes similarity with Magdalena in order to encourage the relationship. On the other hand, if Magdalena finds Juan annoying, she will emphasize dissimilarity to discourage the relationship, even if it means ignoring obvious similarities.

3. Self-fulfilling Prophecies

A **self-fulfilling prophecy** *has three stages: prediction, action, and verification*. We predict something. We then act, often unconsciously, in a manner that makes it come true. Once it comes true, we have then verified our prediction. If Sterling says to himself, "I can't pass the test," he is less likely to study. This inadequate preparation leads Sterling to fail, thus verifying the initial prediction. If Lee decides to go with his girlfriend to see what he thinks is a "chick flick," he may very well go into the theatre with the assumption, "This movie will be stupid, and I will not enjoy it." Lee will then tend to focus on anything he sees as “stupid,” reinforcing his initial assumption. Because he focused on parts of the movie fulfilling his prediction, Lee ends up experiencing a

"stupid" movie in his mind. If a student has a firmly held expectation about an instructor being boring, they are more likely to look for evidence the teacher is boring instead of allowing their perception of the instructor to be based on what the teacher actually does in the classroom. Self-fulfilling prophecies distort perceptions by distorting our focus.

4. Perceptual Defense

Perceptual defense is *our drive to maintain existing or strongly desired interpretations*. The power of simplicity tells us that changing interpretations can be very discomforting. We do not like to change how we look at something, especially when the required change is from a comfortable, less troubling interpretation to a more troubling one. The first step for a person to seek help for alcoholism is to change their self-perception from "I don't have a problem" to "I do have a problem." This is a very difficult and disconcerting perceptual shift, and accordingly it is a challenging first step in seeking help.

Our tendency to look for evidence supporting what we want to be true is **confirmation bias**. Confirmation bias is *our tendency to emphasize and attend to evidence that supports conclusions we favor, and conversely our tendency to minimize and ignore evidence that is contrary to our desired perceptions* (RationalWiki, 2013). If Aila does not want to accept that her son, Rashid, is a bully and trouble-maker at school, she will reject, minimize, or dismiss any evidence the school presents her supporting that view. Since it is more comfortable to maintain the perception that Rashid is a good student, she defends her perception by discounting the evidence that questions her viewpoint. Parents do not like to see their children having trouble socially or physically, but if they do not shift their perception and acknowledge reality, they will not be driven to seek help for their child. As our parents age, we do not wish to see them beginning to fail physically or mentally. We do not like to see our loved ones moving toward death, yet if we do not acknowledge those changes, we cannot take measures to aid our parents in their advanced years.

With the advent of the internet, we have seen a dramatic growth in the tendency of people to exist in an **echo chamber** to fulfill their confirmation biases (DiFonzo, 2011). An echo chamber *is a virtual space in which we receive only information which confirms positions and beliefs we prefer*. A recent example is the 2024 US election conversation on social platforms, where feeds increasingly served users more of the same partisan takes—and even AI-generated or doctored content—creating ideological echo chambers that amplified belief-confirming narratives while filtering out dissenting views. Limiting oneself to an echo chamber can happen with any group anywhere on a value spectrum, and the internet has made living in such echo chambers extremely easy.

5. Social pressure

Acceptance and belongingness are fundamental human drives. One way to meet these needs is to share perceptions. In the 1950s, Solomon Asch found that in many instances, *we will conform to perceptions different than our own, at least temporarily, to avoid threats to our sense of acceptance* (McLeod, 2008). We will tend to laugh along with others, even if we are not exactly sure what is funny. As we talk to our friends, we naturally share how we see the world, they share how they see the world, and we tend to adapt to each other. A reference group of five high school guys will have very similar interpretations of what it means to be "cool," what it means for a girl to be attractive, and what movies or music are good. Of course, this holds true for female groups or mixed gender groups as well. When confronted with the choice of having a different perception and risking acceptance, or having a similar perception and enhancing acceptance, we often gravitate to the shared perception.

Actions based on this drive for acceptance is commonly called **herd mentality**. Dr. Conlin Torney of the University of Exeter explains:

> Social influence is a powerful force in nature and society. Copying what other individuals do can be useful in many situations, such as what kind of phone to buy, or for animals, which way to move or whether a situation is dangerous. However, the challenge is in evaluating personal beliefs when they contradict what others are doing. We showed that evolution will lead individuals to overuse social information, and copy others too much [sic] than they should. The result is that groups evolve to be unresponsive to changes in their environment and spend too much time copying one another, and not making their own decisions (University of Exeter, 2014).

As with other perceptual processes, the danger with social pressure and a herd mentality is not realizing how our personal beliefs, values, and behaviors may be compromised. We may act in ways that, upon reflection, are inconsistent with long-held beliefs. For example, a common issue for new college students is balancing finding a place of acceptance and inclusion on campus without giving in to social pressures to act in uncomfortable ways such as drinking alcohol. Sometimes the conflict of social pressures to drink and one's personal belief in moderation becomes quite strong and can lead to some compromising decisions.

In closing, remember the three stages of the perception process: we select which stimuli to notice, organize those inputs using

patterns, and interpret them through our experiences and biases. We study these stages because they shape every message we send and receive; by recognizing where misperceptions start, we can check our assumptions, reduce bias, adapt to our audience, and communicate more accurately and empathetically.

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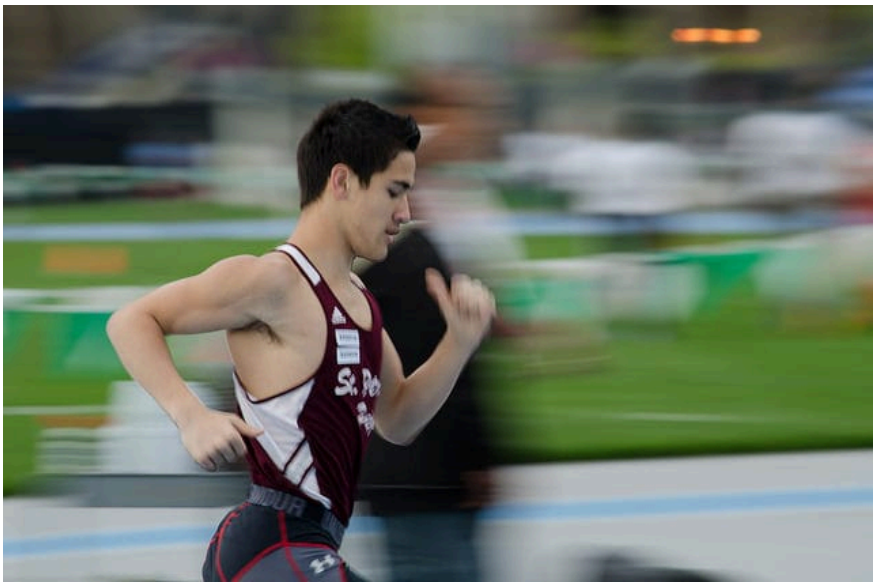
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2.3: Perceiving and Presenting Self

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

Self-Concept

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



Men are more likely than women to include group memberships in their self-concept descriptions. Stefano Ravalli – In control – CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

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

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. **Social comparison theory** states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference (Hargie, 2011). In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group isn't appropriate. **Reference groups** are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social

comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

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

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the judgments and evaluations we make about our self-concept. While self-concept is a broad description of the self, self-esteem is a more specifically an evaluation of the self (Byrne, 1996). If I again prompted you to "Tell me who you are," and then asked you to evaluate (label as good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable) each of the things you listed about yourself, I would get clues about your self-esteem. Like self-concept, self-esteem has general and specific elements. Generally, some people are more likely to evaluate themselves positively while others are more likely to evaluate themselves negatively (Brockner, 1988). More specifically, our self-esteem varies across our life span and across contexts.



Self-esteem varies throughout our lives, but some people generally think more positively of themselves and some people think more negatively. RHiNO NEAL – [trophy] – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

How we judge ourselves affects our communication and our behaviors, but not every negative or positive judgment carries the same weight. The negative evaluation of a trait that isn't very important for our self-concept will likely not result in a loss of self-esteem. For example, I am not very good at drawing. While I appreciate drawing as an art form, I don't consider drawing ability to be a very big part of my self-concept. If someone critiqued my drawing ability, my self-esteem wouldn't take a big hit. I do consider myself a good teacher, however, and I have spent and continue to spend considerable time and effort on improving my knowledge of teaching and my teaching skills. If someone critiqued my teaching knowledge and/or abilities, my self-esteem would definitely be hurt. This doesn't mean that we can't be evaluated on something we find important. Even though teaching is

very important to my self-concept, I am regularly evaluated on it. Every semester, I am evaluated by my students, and every year, I am evaluated by my dean, department chair, and colleagues. Most of that feedback is in the form of constructive criticism, which can still be difficult to receive, but when taken in the spirit of self-improvement, it is valuable and may even enhance our self-concept and self-esteem. In fact, in professional contexts, people with higher self-esteem are more likely to work harder based on negative feedback, are less negatively affected by work stress, are able to handle workplace conflict better, and are better able to work independently and solve problems (Brockner, 1988). Self-esteem isn't the only factor that contributes to our self-concept; perceptions about our competence also play a role in developing our sense of self.

Self-Efficacy

Self-Efficacy refers to the judgments people make about their ability to perform a task within a specific context (Bandura, 1997). As you can see in Figure 2.2 "Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept", judgments about our self-efficacy influence our self-esteem, which influences our self-concept. The following example also illustrates these interconnections.



Figure 2.2 Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept

Pedro did a good job on his first college speech. During a meeting with his professor, Pedro indicates that he is confident going into the next speech and thinks he will do well. This skill-based assessment is an indication that Pedro has a high level of self-efficacy related to public speaking. If he does well on the speech, the praise from his classmates and professor will reinforce his self-efficacy and lead him to positively evaluate his speaking skills, which will contribute to his self-esteem. By the end of the class, Pedro likely thinks of himself as a good public speaker, which may then become an important part of his self-concept. Throughout these points of connection, it's important to remember that self-perception affects how we communicate, behave, and perceive other things. Pedro's increased feeling of self-efficacy may give him more confidence in his delivery, which will likely result in positive feedback that reinforces his self-perception. He may start to perceive his professor more positively since they share an interest in public speaking, and he may begin to notice other people's speaking skills more during class presentations and public lectures. Over time, he may even start to think about changing his major to communication or pursuing career options that incorporate public speaking, which would further integrate being "a good public speaker" into his self-concept. You can hopefully see that these interconnections can create powerful positive or negative cycles. While some of this process is under our control, much of it is also shaped by the people in our lives.

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

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

These different selves can conflict with each other in various combinations. Discrepancies between the actual and ideal/ought selves can be motivating in some ways and prompt people to act for self-improvement. For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so. Discrepancies between the ideal and ought selves can be especially stressful. For example, many professional women who are also mothers have an ideal view of self that includes professional success and advancement. They may also have an ought self that includes a sense of duty and obligation to be a full-time mother. The actual self may be someone who does OK at both but doesn't quite live up to the expectations of either. These discrepancies do not just create cognitive unease—they also lead to emotional, behavioral, and communicative changes.



People who feel that it's their duty to recycle but do not actually do it will likely experience a discrepancy between their actual and ought selves. Matt Martin – Recycle – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

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

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

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

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

Influences on Self-Perception

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

Social and Family Influences

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

Parents and peers shape our self-perceptions in positive and negative ways. Feedback that we get from significant others, which includes close family, can lead to positive views of self (Hargie, 2011). 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). Such parents also communicate generally negative evaluations to their child by saying, for example, "You can't do anything right!" or "You're a bad girl." When children do exhibit positive behaviors, abusive parents are more likely to use external attributions that diminish the achievement of the child by saying, for example, "You only won because the other team was off their game." 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.



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

Culture

How people perceive themselves varies across cultures. For example, many cultures exhibit a phenomenon known as the **self-enhancement bias**, meaning that we tend to emphasize our desirable qualities relative to other people (Loughnan et al., 2011). But the degree to which people engage in self-enhancement varies. A review of many studies in this area found that people

in Western countries such as the United States were significantly more likely to self-enhance than people in countries such as Japan. Many scholars explain this variation using a common measure of cultural variation that claims people in individualistic cultures are more likely to engage in competition and openly praise accomplishments than people in collectivistic cultures. The difference in self-enhancement has also been tied to economics, with scholars arguing that people in countries with greater income inequality are more likely to view themselves as superior to others or want to be perceived as superior to others (even if they don't have economic wealth) in order to conform to the country's values and norms. This holds true because countries with high levels of economic inequality, like the United States, typically value competition and the right to boast about winning or succeeding, while countries with more economic equality, like Japan, have a cultural norm of modesty (Loughnan, 2011).



Biracial individuals may have challenges with self-perception as they try to integrate both racial identities into their self-concept. Javcon117* – End of Summer Innocence – CC BY-SA 2.0.

There are some general differences in terms of gender and self-perception that relate to self-concept, self-efficacy, and envisioning ideal selves. As with any cultural differences, these are generalizations that have been supported by research, but they do not represent all individuals within a group. Regarding self-concept, men are more likely to describe themselves in terms of their group membership, and women are more likely to include references to relationships in their self-descriptions. For example, a man may note that he is a Tarheel fan, a boat enthusiast, or a member of the Rotary Club, and a woman may note that she is a mother of two or a loyal friend.

Regarding self-efficacy, men tend to have higher perceptions of self-efficacy than women (Hargie, 2011). In terms of actual and ideal selves, men and women in a variety of countries both described their ideal self as more masculine (Best & Thomas, 2004). As was noted earlier, gender differences are interesting to study but are very often exaggerated beyond the actual variations. Socialization and internalization of societal norms for gender differences accounts for much more of our perceived differences than do innate or natural differences between genders. These gender norms may be explicitly stated—for example, a mother may say to her son, "Boys don't play with dolls"—or they may be more implicit, with girls being encouraged to pursue historically feminine professions like teaching or nursing without others actually stating the expectation.

Media

The representations we see in the media affect our self-perception. The vast majority of media images include idealized representations of attractiveness. Despite the fact that the images of people we see in glossy magazines and on movie screens are not typically what we see when we look at the people around us in a classroom, at work, or at the grocery store, many of us continue to hold ourselves to an unrealistic standard of beauty and attractiveness. Movies, magazines, and television shows are filled with beautiful people, and less attractive actors, when they are present in the media, are typically portrayed as the butt of jokes, villains, or only as background extras (Patzer, 2008). Aside from overall attractiveness, the media also offers narrow representations of acceptable body weight.

In terms of self-concept, media representations offer us guidance on what is acceptable or unacceptable and valued or not valued in our society. Mediated messages, in general, reinforce cultural stereotypes related to race, gender, age, sexual orientation,

ability, and class. People from historically marginalized groups must look much harder than those in the dominant groups to find positive representations of their identities in media. As a critical thinker, it is important to question media messages and to examine who is included and who is excluded.

Advertising in particular encourages people to engage in social comparison, regularly communicating to us that we are inferior because we lack a certain product or that we need to change some aspect of our life to keep up with and be similar to others. For example, for many years advertising targeted to women instilled in them a fear of having a dirty house, selling them products that promised to keep their house clean, make their family happy, and impress their friends and neighbors. Now messages tell us to fear becoming old or unattractive, selling products to keep our skin tight and clear, which will in turn make us happy and popular.

Self-Presentation

How we perceive ourselves manifests in how we present ourselves to others. Self-presentation is the process of strategically concealing or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions (Human et al., 2012). We engage in this process daily and for different reasons. Although people occasionally intentionally deceive others in the process of self-presentation, in general we try to make a good impression while still remaining authentic.

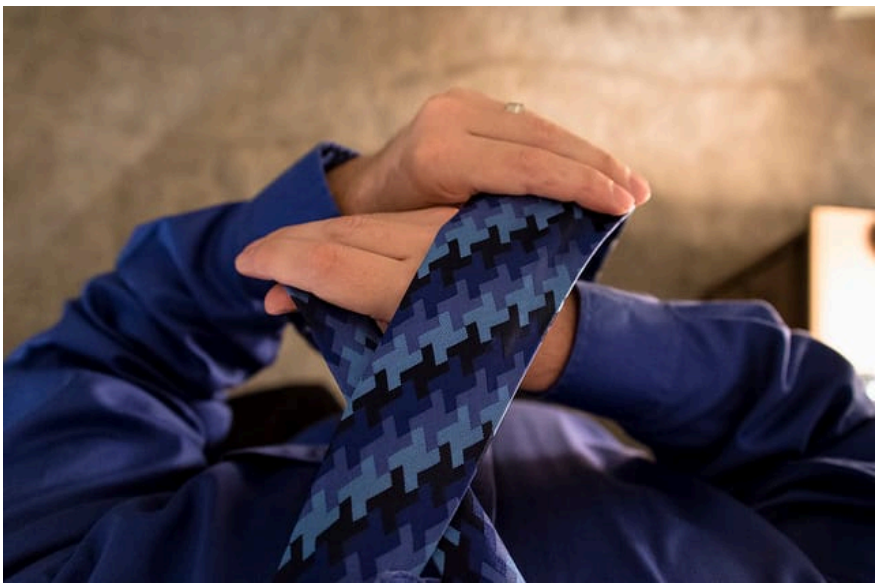


Figure: People who have been out of work for a while may have difficulty finding the motivation to engage in the self-presentation beha needed to form favorable impressions. Steve Petrucelli – Interview Time! – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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

In general, we strive to present a public image that matches up with our self-concept, but we can also use self-presentation strategies to enhance our self-concept (Hargie, 2011). When we present ourselves in order to evoke a positive evaluative response, we are engaging in self-enhancement. In the pursuit of self-enhancement, a person might try to be as appealing as possible in a particular area or with a particular person to gain feedback that will enhance one's self-esteem. For example, a singer might train and practice for weeks before singing in front of a well-respected vocal coach but not invest as much effort in preparing to sing in front of friends. Although positive feedback from friends is beneficial, positive feedback from an experienced singer could enhance a person's self-concept. Self-enhancement can be productive and achieved competently, or it can be used inappropriately. Using self-enhancement behaviors just to gain the approval of others or out of self-centeredness may lead people to communicate in ways that are perceived as phony or overbearing and end up making an unfavorable impression (Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002).

Our perception of ourselves shapes how we communicate just as much as our perception of others. The perceiving self (self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy) shapes how you think, feel, and behave, while the presenting self (impression management) is how you intentionally or unintentionally signal that identity to others—offline and online. We study self-perception because accurate, flexible views of ourselves improve confidence, guide ethical and authentic self-presentation, and make our communication clearer and more empathetic. When you understand how feedback and context shape who you think you are—and how your digital and face-to-face choices project that image—you can better align your messages with your values, adapt to audiences, and build stronger relationships.

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2.4: Improving Perception

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

Since self-concept and self-esteem are so subjective and personal, it would be inaccurate to say that someone's self-concept is "right" or "wrong." Instead, we can identify negative and positive aspects of self-perceptions as well as discuss common barriers to forming accurate and positive self-perceptions. We can also identify common patterns that people experience that interfere with their ability to monitor, understand, and change their self-perceptions. Changing your overall self-concept or self-esteem is not an easy task given that these are overall reflections on who we are and how we judge ourselves that are constructed over many interactions. A variety of life-changing events can relatively quickly alter our self-perceptions. Think of how your view of self changed when you moved from high school to college. Similarly, other people's self-perceptions likely change when they enter into a committed relationship, have a child, make a geographic move, or start a new job. Aside from experiencing life-changing events, we can make slower changes to our self-perceptions with concerted efforts aimed at becoming more competent communicators through self-monitoring and reflection. Let's now discuss some suggestions to help avoid common barriers to accurate and positive self-perceptions and patterns of behavior that perpetuate negative self-perception cycles.



Having a child can lead to a major change in a person's self-concept. Photophile – Father & Son 2055 – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Avoid Reliance on Rigid Schema

As we learned earlier, schemata are sets of information based on cognitive and experiential knowledge that guide our interaction. We rely on schemata almost constantly to help us make sense of the world around us. Sometimes schemata become so familiar that we use them as scripts, which prompts mindless communication and can lead us to overlook new information that may need

to be incorporated into the schema. So it's important to remain mindful of new or contradictory information that may warrant revision of a schema. Being mindful is difficult, however, especially since we often unconsciously rely on schemata. Think about how when you're driving a familiar route you sometimes fall under "highway hypnosis." Despite all the advanced psychomotor skills needed to drive, such as braking, turning, and adjusting to other drivers, we can pull into a familiar driveway or parking lot having driven the whole way on autopilot. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. But have you slipped into autopilot on a familiar route only to remember that you are actually going somewhere else after you've already missed your turn? This example illustrates the importance of keeping our schemata flexible and avoiding mindless communication.

Be Critical of Socializing Forces

We learned earlier that family, friends, sociocultural norms, and the media are just some of the socializing forces that influence our thinking and therefore influence our self-perception. These powerful forces serve positive functions but can also set into motion negative patterns of self-perception. We have already discussed how the media presents us with narrow and often unrealistic standards for attractiveness. Even though most of us know that these standards don't represent what is normal or natural for the human body, we internalize these ideals, which results in various problems ranging from eating disorders, to depression, to poor self-esteem.



The "Healthy at Every Size" movement strives to teach people that being thin doesn't necessarily mean a person is healthy. Pixabay – CC0 public domain.

Cultural influences related to identities and difference can also lead to distorted self-perceptions, especially for people who occupy marginalized or oppressed identities. While perception research has often been used to support the notion that individuals who are subjected to discrimination, like racial and ethnic minorities, are likely to have low self-esteem because they internalize negative societal views, this is not always the case (Armenta & Hunt, 2009). In fact, even some early perception research showed that minorities do not just passively accept the negative views society places on them. Instead, they actively try to maintain favorable self-perceptions in the face of discriminatory attitudes. Numerous studies have shown that people in groups that are the targets of discrimination may identify with their in-group more because of this threat, which may actually help them maintain psychological well-being. In short, they reject the negative evaluations of the out-group and find refuge and support in their identification with others who share their marginalized status.

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). 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. Take the following scenario as an example: An insecure person assumes that his date will not like him. During the date he doesn't engage in much conversation, discloses negative information about himself, and exhibits anxious behaviors. Because of these behaviors, his date forms a negative impression and suggests they not see each other again, reinforcing his original belief that the date wouldn't like him. The example shows how a pattern of thinking can lead to a pattern of behavior that reinforces the thinking, and so on. Luckily, experimental research shows that self-affirmation techniques can be successfully used to intervene in such self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking positive thoughts and focusing on personality strengths can stop this negative cycle of thinking and has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinston et al., 2011).

Create and Maintain Supporting Interpersonal Relationships

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

Beware of Distorted Patterns of Thinking and Acting

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



Some people have speculated that men who have a midlife crisis may overcompensate for a perceived loss in status or power due to age by purchasing material things that make them appear more youthful. Kevin Dooley – Midlife crisis car – CC BY 2.0.

People with low self-esteem may act in ways that overcompensate for their feelings of low self-worth and other insecurities. Whether it's the businessman buying his midlife crisis Corvette, the "country boy" adding monster tires to his truck, or the community leader who wears several carats of diamonds everywhere she goes, people often turn to material possessions to try to boost self-esteem. While these purchases may make people feel better in the short term, they may have negative financial effects that can exacerbate negative self-perceptions and lead to interpersonal conflict. People also compensate for self-esteem with their relational choices. A person who is anxious about his career success may surround himself with people who he deems less successful than himself. In this case, being a big fish in a small pond helps some people feel better about themselves when they engage in social comparison.

People can also get into a negative thought and action cycle by setting unrealistic goals and consistently not meeting them.

Similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy, people who set unrealistic goals can end up with negative feelings of self-efficacy, which as we learned earlier, can negatively affect self-esteem and self-concept. The goals we set should be challenging but progressive, meaning we work to meet a realistic goal, then increase our expectations and set another goal, and so on.

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

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

As we will learn in Chapter 5 "Listening", effective listening is not easy, and most of us do not make a concerted effort to overcome common barriers to listening. Our fast-paced lives and cultural values that emphasize speaking over listening sometimes make listening feel like a chore. But we shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can also help us expand our self- and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and taking on different perspectives. Empathetic listening is challenging because it requires cognitive and emotional investment that goes beyond the learning of a skill set.

Beware of Stereotypes and Prejudice

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

While the negative effects of stereotypes are pretty straightforward in that they devalue people and prevent us from adapting and revising our schemata, positive stereotypes also have negative consequences. For example, the "model minority" stereotype has been applied to some Asian cultures in the United States. Seemingly positive stereotypes of Asian Americans as hardworking, intelligent, and willing to adapt to "mainstream" culture are not always received as positive and can lead some people within these communities to feel objectified, ignored, or overlooked.

Stereotypes can also lead to double standards that point to larger cultural and social inequalities. There are many more words to describe a sexually active female than a male, and the words used for females are disproportionately negative, while those used for males are more positive. Since stereotypes are generally based on a lack of information, we must take it upon ourselves to gain exposure to new kinds of information and people, which will likely require us to get out of our comfort zones. When we do meet people, we should base the impressions we make on describable behavior rather than inferred or secondhand information. When stereotypes negatively influence our overall feelings and attitudes about a person or group, prejudiced thinking results.

Prejudice is negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities. Prejudice can have individual or widespread negative effects. At the individual level, a hiring manager may not hire a young man with a physical disability (even though that would be illegal if it were the only reason), which negatively affects that one man. However, if pervasive cultural thinking that people with physical disabilities are mentally deficient leads hiring managers all over the country to make similar decisions, then the prejudice has become a social injustice. In another example, when the disease we know today as AIDS started killing large numbers of people in the early 1980s, response by some health and government officials was influenced by prejudice. Since the disease was primarily affecting gay men, Haitian immigrants, and drug users, the disease was prejudged to be a disease that affected only "deviants" and therefore didn't get the same level of attention it would have otherwise. It took many years, investment of much money, and education campaigns to help people realize that HIV and AIDS do not prejudge based on race or sexual orientation and can affect any human.

Engage in Self-Reflection

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

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

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

Checking Perception

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

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

Stefano and Patrick are roommates. Stefano is in the living room playing a video game when he sees Patrick walk through the room with his suitcase and walk out the front door. Since Patrick didn't say or wave good-bye, Stefano has to make sense of this encounter, and perception checking can help him do that. First, he needs to try to describe (not evaluate yet) what just happened. This can be done by asking yourself, "What is going on?" In this case, Patrick left without speaking or waving good-bye. Next, Stefano needs to think of some possible interpretations of what just happened. One interpretation could be that Patrick is mad about something (at him or someone else). Another could be that he was in a hurry and simply forgot, or that he didn't want to interrupt the video game. In this step of perception checking, it is good to be aware of the attributions you are making. You might try to determine if you are overattributing internal or external causes. Lastly, you will want to verify and clarify. So Stefano might ask a mutual friend if she knows what might be bothering Patrick or going on in his life that made him leave so suddenly. Or he may also just want to call, text, or speak to Patrick. During this step, it's important to be aware of punctuation. Even though Stefano has already been thinking about this incident, and is experiencing some conflict, Patrick may have no idea that his actions caused Stefano to worry. If Stefano texts and asks why he's mad (which wouldn't be a good idea because it's an assumption) Patrick may become defensive, which could escalate the conflict. Stefano could just describe the behavior (without judging Patrick) and ask for clarification by saying, "When you left today you didn't say bye or let me know where you were going. I just wanted to check to see if things are OK."

The steps of perception checking as described in the previous scenario are as follows:

- Step 1: Describe the behavior or situation without evaluating or judging it.
- Step 2: Think of some possible interpretations of the behavior, being aware of attributions and other influences on the perception process.
- Step 3: Verify what happened and ask for clarification from the other person's perspective. Be aware of punctuation, since the other person likely experienced the event differently than you.

In closing, improving perception is an active, learnable habit: monitor your self-perception by noticing how schemata, socializing forces, self-fulfilling prophecies, and negative thinking can distort your self-views; then adjust with mindful self-monitoring and reflection. When perceiving others, slow down and listen empathetically, challenge stereotypes and prejudice, and use perception checking: describe what you observed, consider multiple explanations, and ask for clarification. These skills help you replace assumptions with evidence, reduce bias, and communicate with greater accuracy and empathy.

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2.5: Chapter 2 Summary

Social Percpetion Review

What social perception means and why it matters

- We live in a sense–think–respond world: we don't react to raw stimuli; we react to our interpretation of it.
- Perception is how we build mental models of the "world out there," which then drive our communication choices.
- Humans are pattern-seekers (patternicity). Patterns reduce uncertainty and help us predict—but they can also fuel biases.

The six perceptions in any interaction

- Your self-concept: how you see yourself.
- Your other-concept: how you see the other person.
- Your meta-concept: how you think they see you.
- Their self-concept, other-concept (of you), and meta-concept mirror these on their side.
- Practical takeaway: Early impressions = hypotheses. Update with evidence.

The perception process: 3 stages

1. Sensory stimulation and selection
    - We filter massive input; attention is guided by needs, interests, expectations, and physiology.
    - Examples: "cocktail party effect," noticing restaurants only when hungry.
2. Organization (Gestalt principles)
    - We sort stimuli using:
        - Patterns (templates we've learned)
        - Proximity/figure–ground (context changes meaning)
        - Simplicity (favor easy stories—risk: stereotyping, type-casting)
        - Closure (filling gaps—risk: treating guesses as facts)
3. Interpretation
    - We assign meaning using:
        - Implicit personality theories (halo effect; stereotyping)
        - Assumed similarity/dissimilarity (fast but often wrong)
        - Self-fulfilling prophecies (prediction → behavior → "proof")
        - Perceptual defense/confirmation bias (we notice what we want to be true)
        - Social pressure and herd mentality (echo chambers reinforce one view)

Perceiving and presenting self

- Self-concept: who you think you are (shaped by context and feedback).
- Self-esteem: evaluations of your self-concept.
- Self-efficacy: confidence to perform specific tasks; successes/feedback can spiral up or down across all three.
- Self-discrepancy theory: tensions among actual, ideal, and ought selves affect emotions, behavior, and communication.
- Socializing forces (family, culture, media) shape self-perception:
    - Culture: individualistic vs. collectivistic norms influence self-enhancement and modesty.
    - Media: idealized bodies and narrow roles impact body image and identity.
- Self-presentation: impression management that can be prosocial (role-modeling) or self-serving; authenticity matters, especially online.

Common biases to watch for

- Stereotypes and prejudice (reduce people to group labels; create injustice).

- Confirmation bias and echo chambers (seek only confirming info).
- Over-simplicity (first impressions, “easy” stories).
- Figure–ground errors (judging people without considering context).

Skills to improve perception

- Identify negative and positive aspects of self-perception.
  - Avoid reliance on rigid schema.
  - Be critical of socializing forces.
  - Beware of self-fulfilling prophecies.
  - Create and maintain supporting interpersonal relationships.
  - Beware of distorted patters of thinking and acting.
- Perception checking (3 steps)
  1. Describe the behavior you observed (no judgment).
  2. Offer 2–3 possible interpretations.
  3. Ask for clarification and listen to their perspective.
- Empathetic listening
  - Slow down, reflect feelings/meanings, ask open questions.
- Bias interrupters
  - Name the stereotype, seek disconfirming evidence, diversify sources to escape echo chambers.
- Self-reflection
  - Ask: What am I assuming? What evidence do I have? What would change my mind?

Quick applied examples

- Dating/texting: If replies slow, don’t jump to “they’re uninterested.” Use perception checking.
- Team meeting: Blank stares? Switch from abstract to concrete examples (audience adaptation).
- Social media: Curate posts with authenticity; remember digital trails shape others’ other-/meta-concepts of you.

Self-check questions

- Which stage (selection, organization, interpretation) is shaping my view most right now?
- What bias might be operating (halo, stereotype, closure, confirmation)?
- What simple question could I ask to test my interpretation?

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3: VERBAL COMMUNICATION

3.1: The Nature of Language
3.2: Language, Society, and Culture
3.3: The Power of Language
3.4: Using Words Well
3.5: Chapter 3 Summary

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3.1: The Nature of Language

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- define verbal communication and list the four rule systems (phonology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics).
- compare spoken and written communication on four points: formality, timing, permanence, and privacy.
- explain how language shapes how we see the world, organize ideas, and think.
- spot biased/sexist/racist wording.
- create messages that are clear, respectful, and audience-appropriate.

***"Consciousness can't evolve any faster than language"* – Terence McKenna**



Imagine for a moment that you have no language with which to communicate. It's hard to imagine isn't it? It's probably even harder to imagine that with all of the advancements we have at our disposal today, there are people in our world who actually do not have, or cannot use, language to communicate.

Nearly 25 years ago, the Nicaraguan government started bringing deaf children together from all over the country in an attempt to educate them. These children had spent their lives in remote places and had no contact with other deaf people. They had never learned a language and could not understand their teachers or each other. Likewise, their teachers could not understand them. Shortly after bringing these students together, the teachers noticed that the students communicated with each other in what appeared to be an organized fashion: they had literally brought together the individual gestures they used at home and composed them into a new language. Although the teachers still did not understand what the kids were saying, they were astonished at what they were witnessing—the birth of a new language in the late 20th century! This was an unprecedented discovery.

Adrien Perez, one of the early deaf students who formed this new language (referred to as Nicaraguan Sign Language), says that without verbal communication, "You can't express your feelings. Your thoughts may be there but you can't get them out. And you can't get new thoughts in." As one of the few people on earth who has experienced life with and without verbal communication, his comments speak to the heart of communication: it is the essence of who we are and how we understand our world. We use it to form our identities, initiate and maintain relationships, express our needs and wants, construct and shape world-views, and achieve personal goals (Pelley).

Defining Verbal Communication

When people ponder the word communication, they often think about the act of talking. We rely on verbal communication to exchange messages with one another and develop as individuals. The term verbal communication often evokes the idea of spoken communication, but written communication is also part of verbal communication. Reading this book you are decoding the authors' written verbal communication in order to learn more about communication. Let's explore the various components of our definition of verbal communication and examine how it functions in our lives.

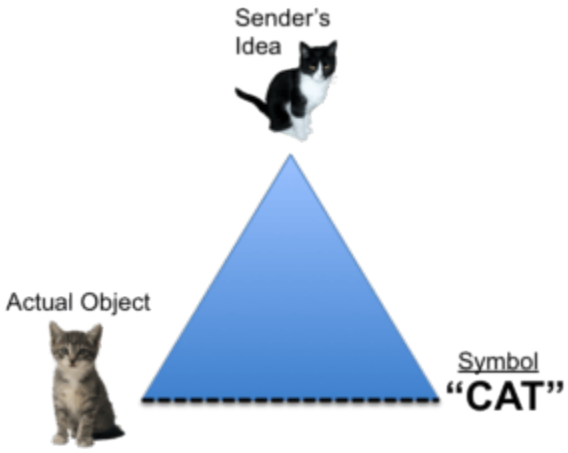
Verbal communication is about language, both written and spoken. In general, verbal communication refers to our use of words while nonverbal communication refers to communication that occurs through means other than words, such as body language, gestures, and silence. Both verbal and nonverbal communication can be spoken and written. Many people mistakenly assume that verbal communication refers only to spoken communication. However, you will learn that this is not the case. Let's say you tell a friend a joke and he or she laughs in response. Is the laughter verbal or nonverbal communication? Why? As laughter is not a word we would consider this vocal act as a form of nonverbal communication. For simplification, the box below highlights the kinds of communication that fall into the various categories. You can find many definitions of verbal communication in our literature, but for this text, we define **Verbal Communication** as *an agreed-upon and rule-governed system of symbols used to share meaning*. Let's examine each component of this definition in detail.

	Verbal Communication	**Nonverbal Communication**
Oral	Spoken Language	Laughing, Crying, Coughing, etc.
Non Oral	Written Language/Sign Language	Gestures, Body Language, etc.

A System of Symbols

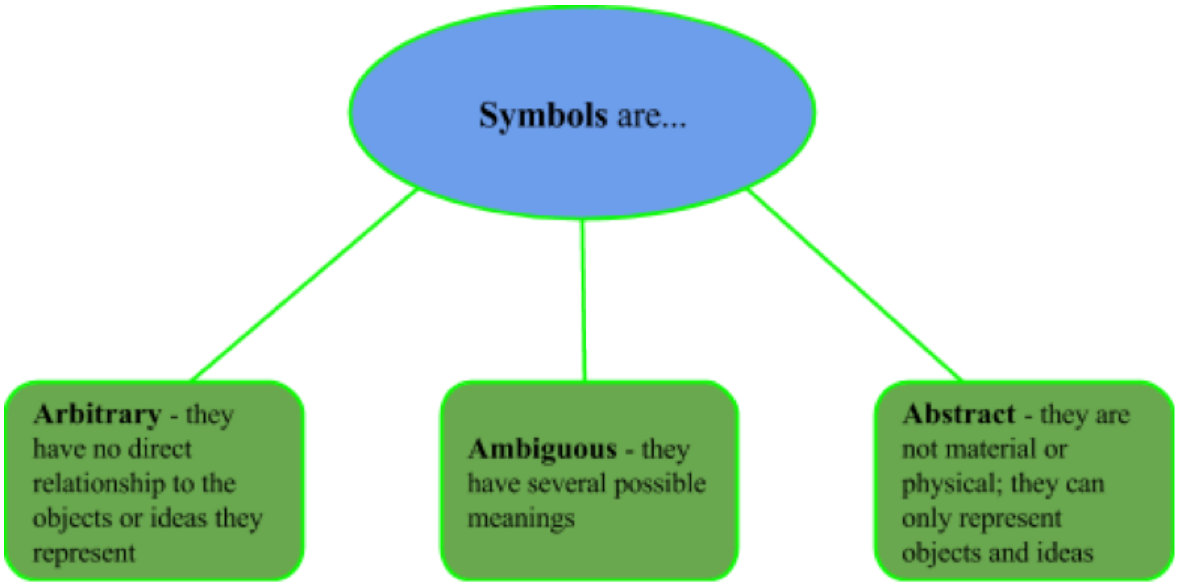
As discussed in the first chapter, **symbols** are *arbitrary representations of thoughts, ideas, emotions, objects, or actions used to encode and decode meaning* (Nelson & Kessler Shaw). Symbols stand for, or represent, something else. For example, there is nothing inherent about calling a cat a cat.

Rather, English speakers have agreed that these symbols (words), whose components (letters) are used in a particular order each time, stand for both the actual object, as well as our interpretation of that object. This idea is illustrated by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richard's triangle of meaning. The word "cat" is not the actual cat. Nor does it have any direct connection to an actual cat. Instead, it is a symbolic representation of our idea of a cat, as indicated by the line going from the word "cat" to the speaker's idea of "cat" to the actual object.



Symbols have three distinct qualities: they are arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract. Notice that the picture of the cat on the left side of the triangle more closely represents a real cat than the word "cat." However, we do not use pictures as language, or verbal communication. Instead, we use words to represent our ideas. This example demonstrates our agreement that the word "cat" represents or stands for a real cat AND our idea of a cat. The symbols we use are **arbitrary** and have *no direct relationship to the objects or ideas they represent*. We generally consider communication successful when we reach agreement on the meanings of the symbols we use (Duck).

Not only are symbols arbitrary, they are **ambiguous** — that is, they have *several possible meanings*. Imagine your friend tells you she has an apple on her desk. Is she referring to a piece of fruit or her computer? If a friend says that a person he met is cool, does he mean that person is cold or awesome? The meanings of symbols change over time due to changes in social norms, values, and advances in technology. You might be asking, "If symbols can have multiple meanings then how do we communicate and understand one another?" We are able to communicate because there are a finite number of possible meanings for our symbols, a range of meanings which the members of a given language system agree upon. Without an agreed-upon system of symbols, we could share relatively little meaning with one another.



A simple example of ambiguity can be represented by one of your classmates asking a simple question to the teacher during a lecture where she is showing PowerPoint slides: "can you go to the last slide please?" The teacher is half way through the presentation. Is the student asking if the teacher can go back to the previous slide? Or does the student really want the lecture to be over with and is insisting that the teacher jump to the final slide of the presentation? Chances are the student missed a point on the previous slide and would like to see it again to quickly take notes. However, suspense may have overtaken the student and they may have a desire to see the final slide. Even a simple word like "last" can be ambiguous and open to more than one interpretation.

The verbal symbols we use are also **abstract**, meaning that, *words are not material or physical. A certain level of abstraction is inherent in the fact that symbols can only represent objects and ideas*. This abstraction allows us to use a phrase like "the public" in a broad way to mean all the people in the United States rather than having to distinguish among all the diverse groups that make up the U.S. population. Similarly, in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* book series, wizards and witches call the non-magical population on earth "muggles" rather than having to define all the separate cultures of muggles. Abstraction is helpful when you want to communicate complex concepts in a simple way. However, the more abstract the language, the greater potential there is for confusion.

Rule-Governed

Verbal communication is **rule-governed**. *We must follow agreed-upon rules to make sense of the symbols we share*. Let's take another look at our example of the word cat. What would happen if there were no rules for using the symbols (letters) that make up this word? If placing these symbols in a proper order was not important, then cta, tac, tca, act, or atc could all mean cat. Even worse, what if you could use any three letters to refer to cat? Or still worse, what if there were no rules and anything could represent cat? Clearly, it's important that we have rules to govern our verbal communication. There are four general rules for verbal communication, involving the sounds, meaning, arrangement, and use of symbols.

- **Phonology** is *the study of speech sounds*. The pronunciation of the word cat comes from the rules governing how letters sound, especially in relation to one another. The context in which words are spoken may provide answers for how they should be pronounced. When we don't follow phonological rules, confusion results. One way to understand and apply phonological rules is to use syntactic and pragmatic rules to clarify phonological rules.
- **Semantics** help us understand *the difference in meaning between the word cat and the word dog*. Instead of each of these

words meaning any four-legged domestic pet, we use each word to specify what four-legged domestic pet we are talking about. You've probably used these words to say things like, "I'm a cat person" or "I'm a dog person." Each of these statements provides insight into what the sender is trying to communicate. As you've been reading, words (symbols) are arbitrary and attain meaning only when people give them meaning. While we can always look to a dictionary to find a *standardized definition of a word*, or its **denotative meaning**, meanings do not always follow standard, agreed-upon definitions when used in various contexts. For example, think of the word "sick." The denotative definition of the word is ill or unwell. However, **connotative meanings**, *the meanings we assign based on our experiences and beliefs*, are quite varied. Sick can have a connotative meaning that describes something as good or awesome as opposed to its literal meaning of illness, which usually has a negative association. The denotative and connotative definitions of "sick" are in total contrast of one another which can cause confusion. Think about an instance where a student is asked by their parent about a friend at school. The student replies that the friend is "sick." The parent then asks about the new teacher at school and the student describes the teacher as "sick" as well. The parent must now ask for clarification as they do not know if the teacher is in bad health, or is an excellent teacher, and if the friend of their child is ill or awesome.

- **Syntactics** is *the study of language structure and symbolic arrangement*. Syntactics focuses on the rules we use to combine words into meaningful sentences and statements. We speak and write according to agreed-upon syntactic rules to keep meaning coherent and understandable. Think about this sentence: "The pink and purple elephant flapped its wings and flew out the window." While the content of this sentence is fictitious and unreal, you can understand and visualize it because it follows syntactic rules for language structure.
- **Pragmatics** is *the study of how people actually use verbal communication*. For example, as a student you probably speak more formally to your professors than to your peers. It's likely that you make different word choices when you speak to your parents than you do when you speak to your friends. Think of the words "bowel movements," "poop," "crap," and "shit." While all of these words have essentially the same denotative meaning, people make choices based on context and audience regarding which word they feel comfortable using. These differences illustrate the pragmatics of our verbal communication. Even though you use agreed-upon symbolic systems and follow phonological, syntactic, and semantic rules, you apply these rules differently in different contexts. Each communication context has different rules for "appropriate" communication. We are trained from a young age to communicate "appropriately" in different social contexts.

It is only through an agreed-upon and rule-governed system of symbols that we can exchange verbal communication in an effective manner. Without agreement, rules, and symbols, verbal communication would not work. The reality is, after we learn language in school, we don't spend much time consciously thinking about all of these rules, we simply use them. However, rules keep our verbal communication structured in ways that make it useful for us to communicate more effectively.

Spoken Versus Written Communication

While both spoken and written communication function as agreed-upon rule-governed systems of symbols used to convey meaning, there are enough differences in pragmatic rules between writing and speaking to justify discussing some of their differences. Imagine for a moment that you're a college student who desperately needs money. Rather than looking for a job you decide that you're going to ask your parents for the money you need to make it through the end of the semester. Now, you have a few choices for using verbal communication to do this. You might choose to call your parents or talk to them in person. You may take a different approach and write them a letter or send them an email. You can probably identify your own list of pros and cons for each of these approaches. But really, what's the difference between writing and talking in these situations? Let's look at four of the major differences between the two: 1) formal versus informal, 2) synchronous versus asynchronous, 3) recorded versus unrecorded, and 4) privacy.

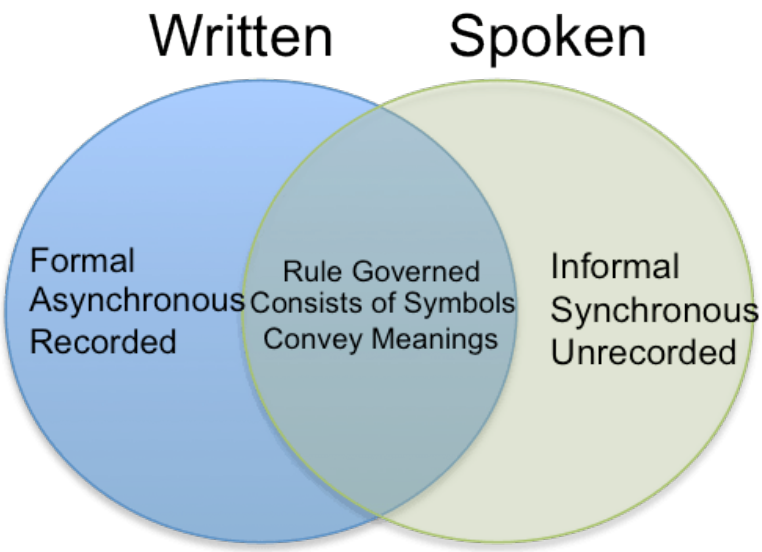


Figure 3.1.1: Written/Spoken Diagram. (CC BY-SA; Spaynton via Wikipedia)

Formality

The first difference between spoken and written communication is that we generally use spoken communication **informally** while we use written communication **formally**. Consider how you have been trained to talk versus how you have been trained to write. Have you ever turned in a paper to a professor that "sounds" like how you talk? How was that paper graded compared to one that follows the more formal structures and rules of the English language? In Western societies like the U.S., we follow more formal standards for our written communication than our spoken communication. With a few exceptions, we generally tolerate verbal mistakes (e.g. "should of" rather than "should have") and qualifiers (e.g. "uh" "um" "you know," etc.) in our speech, but not our writing. Consider a written statement such as, "I should of, um, gone and done somethin' 'bout it' but, um, I I didn't do nothin'." In most written contexts, this is considered unacceptable written verbal communication. However, most of us would not give much thought to hearing this statement spoken aloud by someone. While we may certainly notice mistakes in another's speech, we are generally not inclined to correct those mistakes as we would in written contexts. Even though most try to speak without qualifiers and verbal mistakes, there is something to be said about those utterances in our speech while engaging in an interpersonal conversation. According to John Du Bois, the way two people use utterances and structure their sentences during conversation creates an opportunity to find new meaning within the language and develop "parallelism" which can lead to a natural feeling of liking or sympathy in the conversation partner. So, even though it may seem like formal language is valued over informal, this informal language that most of us use when we speak inadvertently contributes to bringing people closer together.



Figure 3.1.2: Image of two women with phones. (CC BY-SA; Garry Knight via Wikipedia).

While writing is generally more formal and speech more informal, there are some exceptions to the rule, especially with the growing popularity of new technologies. For the first time in history, we are now seeing exceptions in our uses of speech and

writing. Using text messaging and email, people are engaging in forms of writing using more informal rule structures, making their writing "sound" more like conversation. Likewise, this style of writing often attempts to incorporate the use of "nonverbal" communication (known as emoticons) to accent the writing. As we continue using new technologies to communicate, new rule systems for those mediums will continue altering the rule systems in other forms of communication.

Synchronicity

The second difference between spoken and written forms of verbal communication is that spoken communication or speech is almost entirely synchronous while written communication is almost entirely asynchronous. **Synchronous** communication is *communication that takes place in real time*, such as a conversation with a friend. When we are in conversation and even in public speaking situations, immediate feedback and response from the receiver is the rule. For instance, when you say "hello" to someone, you expect that the person will respond immediately. You do not expect that the person will get back to you sometime later in response to your greeting. In contrast, **asynchronous** communication is *communication that is not immediate and occurs over longer periods of time*, such as letters, email, or even text messages at times. When someone writes a book, letter, email, or text, there is no expectation from the sender that the receiver will provide an immediate response. Instead, the expectation is that the receiver will receive the message, and respond to it when they have time. This is one of the reasons people sometimes choose to send an email instead of calling another person, because it allows the receiver to respond when they have time rather than "putting them on the spot" to respond right away.

Just as new technologies are changing the rules of formality and informality, they are also creating new situations that break the norms of written communication as asynchronous and spoken communication as synchronous. Voicemail has turned the telephone and our talk into asynchronous forms of communication. Even though we speak in these contexts, we understand that if we leave a message on voicemail we will not get an immediate reply. Instead, we understand that the receiver will call us back at their convenience. In this example, even though the channel of communication is speaking, there is no expectation for immediate response to the sent message. Similarly, texting is a form of written communication that follows the rules of spoken conversation in that it functions as synchronous communication. When you type a text to someone you know, the expectation is that they will respond almost immediately. The lines continue to blur when video chats were introduced as communication technologies. These are a form of synchronous communication that mimics face-to-face interaction and in some cases even have an option to send written messages to others. The possible back and forth between written and spoken communication has allowed many questions to arise about rules and meaning behind interactions. Maria Sindoni explains in her article, "Through the Looking Glass" that even though people are having a synchronous conversation and are sharing meaning through their words, they are ultimately in different rooms and communicating through a machine which makes the meaning of their exchanges more ambiguous.

Recording

The third difference between spoken and written communication is that written communication is generally *archived and recorded for later retrieval*, while spoken communication is generally not recorded. When we talk with friends, we do not tend to take notes or tape record our conversations. Instead, conversations tend to be ongoing and catalogued into our personal memories rather than recorded in an easily retrievable written format. On the other hand, it is quite easy to reference written works such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and electronic sources such as web pages and emails for long periods after the sender has written them. New communication applications like Vine add to the confusion. This app allows users to record themselves and post it to their profile. This would be considered a form of spoken communication, yet it is archived and asynchronous so others can look at the videos years after the original posting. To make the matter more complicated, on Snapchat, you have the option of sending videos or photos that are traditionally not archived since the sender decides how long the receiver has to view it, and then they will theoretically disappear forever. Most recently with the addition of My Story, users of the app can post a picture for 24 hours and have their friends view it multiple times. The feeling of technological communication not being archived can lead to a false sense of privacy, which can lead to some negative consequences.

As with the previous rules we've discussed, new technologies are changing many of the dynamics of speech and writing. For example, many people use email and texting informally like spoken conversation, as an informal form of verbal communication. Because of this, they often expect that these operate and function like a spoken conversation with the belief that it is a private conversation between the sender and receiver. However, many people have gotten into trouble because of what they have "spoken" about others through email and text. The corporation Epson (a large computer electronics manufacturer) was at the center of one of the first lawsuits regarding the recording and archiving of employees' use of email correspondence. Employees at Epson assumed their email was private and therefore used it to say negative things about their bosses. What they didn't know was their bosses were saving and printing these email messages, and using the content of these messages to make personnel decisions. When employees sued Epson, the courts ruled in favor of the corporation, stating that they had every right to retain

employee email for their records.

While most of us have become accustomed to using technologies such as texting and instant messaging in ways that are similar to our spoken conversations, we must also consider the repercussions of using communication technologies in this fashion because they are often archived and not private. We can see examples of negative outcomes from archived messages in recent years through many highly publicized sexting scandals. One incident that was very pertinent was former congressman and former candidate for Mayor of New York, Anthony Weiner, and a series of inappropriate exchanges with women using communication technologies. Because of his position in power and high media coverage, his privacy was very minimal. Since he had these conversations in a setting that is recorded, he was not able to keep his anonymity or confidentiality in the matter. These acts were seen as inappropriate by the public, so there were both professional and personal repercussions for Weiner. Both the Epson and Anthony Weiner incidents, even though happening in different decades, show the consequences when assumed private information becomes public.

As you can see, there are a number of differences between spoken and written forms of verbal communication. Both forms are rule-governed as our definition points out, but the rules are often different for the use of these two types of verbal communication. However, it's apparent that as new technologies provide more ways for us to communicate, many of our traditional rules for using both speech and writing will continue to blur as we try to determine the "most appropriate" uses of these new communication technologies. Practical problems of the day will continue to guide the directions our field takes as we continue to study the ways technology changes our communication.

In sum, language is the rule-governed system of symbols we use to share meaning—and it's powerful. Because words are arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract, we need shared rules (phonology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics) and context to make sense together. Spoken and written language often play by different rules (formality, timing, permanence, and privacy) but technology now blurs those lines, so assume your "talk" online can travel and last. Now that we have a sense of the nature of language, let's explore its functions in human life.

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3.2: Language, Society, and Culture

Society and culture influence the words that we speak, and the words that we speak influence society and culture. 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).



Social norms influence how conversations start and end and how speakers take turns to keep the conversation going. Felipe Cabrera – conversation – CC BY 2.0.

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).

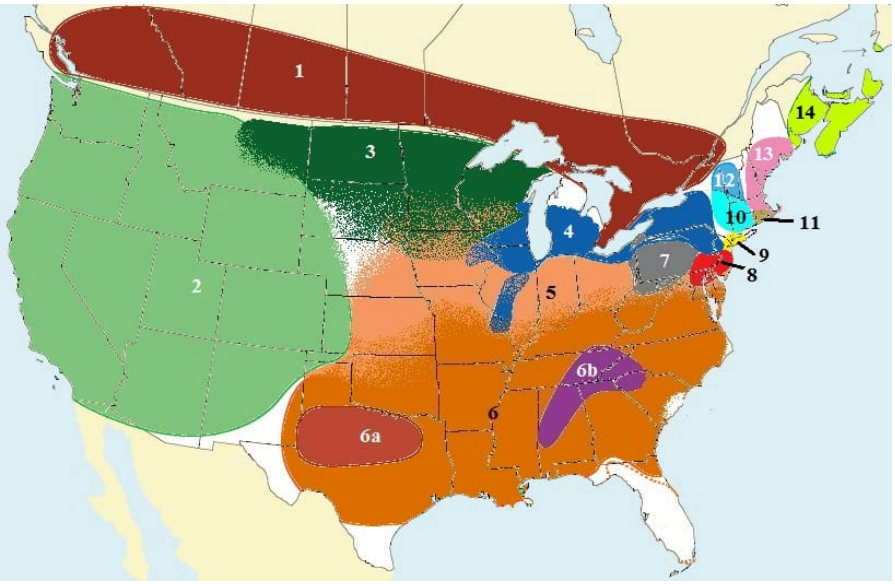
The actual language we speak plays an important role in shaping our reality. Comparing languages, we can see differences in how we are able to talk about the world. In English, we have the words *grandfather* and *grandmother*, but no single word that distinguishes between a maternal grandfather and 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

The documentary *American Tongues*, although dated at this point, is still a fascinating look at the rich tapestry of accents and dialects that makes up American English. Dialects are versions of languages that have distinct words, grammar, and pronunciation. 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.



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. Of course, many people think they speak normally and perceive others to have an accent or dialect. 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.



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 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 *Sex and the City* 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.

In sum, language and culture continually shape each other: from the ways we're socialized into norms and values, to the vocabularies that highlight what we notice, to the accents and dialects that color first impressions. While the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis reminds us that language powerfully influences thought, it doesn't fully determine reality—context, history, and power matter, too. Missteps across languages and communities show why competence requires more than translation; it asks for audience awareness, humility, and flexibility. As speakers, we can converge to build comfort or diverge to honor identity, and we can code-switch strategically without erasing ourselves.

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3.3: The Power of Language

This section explores how words do more than carry messages; they guide attention, group messy experiences into categories, and make memory and planning possible. As we label people and events, we don't just describe reality: we help construct it. You'll see how language supports cognition and why small wording choices can shift what we notice and value. We also introduce the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that argues that language influences thought and worldview, inviting you to weigh evidence and limits.

Language Shapes Thought

Language doesn't just help us talk; it helps us sort, label, and think about our world. Through words, we group messy experiences into categories that make life understandable, we name and evaluate what happens to us, and we build memories and plans. This section shows how verbal communication powers categorization, shapes our sense of reality, and supports cognition, while also exploring how language and thought influence each other through ideas like the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Categorization

Verbal communication helps us organize complex ideas and experiences into meaningful categories, known as **categorization**. Consider the number of things you experience with your five primary senses every day. As we discussed in the chapter on perception, it is impossible to comprehend everything we encounter. We use verbal communication to organize seemingly random events into understandable categories to make sense of our experiences. For example, we all organize the people in our lives into categories. We label these people with terms like, friends, acquaintances, romantic partners, family, peers, colleagues, and strangers. We highlight certain qualities, traits, or scripts to organize outwardly haphazard events into meaningful categories to establish meaning for our world.

Reality construction

Verbal communication helps us define reality. We use verbal communication to define everything from ideas, emotions, experiences, thoughts, objects, and people (Blumer, 1969). Think about how you define yourself. You may define yourself as a student, employee, son/daughter, parent, advocate, etc. You might also define yourself as moral, ethical, a night-owl, or a procrastinator. Verbal communication is how we label and define what we experience in our lives.

These definitions are not only descriptive, but evaluative. Imagine you are at the beach with a few of your friends. The day starts out sunny and beautiful, but the tides quickly turn when rain clouds appear overhead. Because of the unexpected rain, you define the day as disappointing and ugly. Suddenly, your friend comments, "What are you talking about, man? Today is beautiful!" Instead of focusing on the weather, he might be referring to the fact that he was having a good day by spending quality time with his buddies on the beach, rain or shine. This statement reflects that we have choices for how we use verbal communication to define our realities. We make choices about what to focus on and how to define what we experience and its impact on how we understand and live in our world.



Figure 3.3.1: Copy and Paste Caption here. (Photo by Masrur Rahman on Unsplash)

Cognition

Verbal communication helps us think. Without verbal communication, we would not function as thinking beings. The ability most often used to distinguish humans from other animals is our ability to reason and communicate. With language, we are able to reflect on the past, consider the present, and ponder the future. We develop our memories using language. Try recalling your first conscious memories. Chances are, your first conscious memories formed around the time you started using verbal communication.

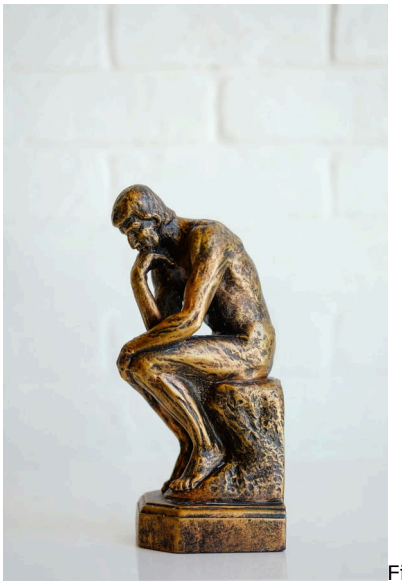


Figure 3.3.1: Copy and Paste Caption here. (Photo by Tingey Injury Law Firm on Unsplash)

Boroditsky (2011, p. 62) claims that people “rely on language even when doing simple things like distinguishing patches of color, counting dots on a screen or orienting in a small room: my colleagues and I have found that limiting people's ability to access their language faculties fluently--by giving them a competing demanding verbal task such as repeating a news report, for instance--impairs their ability to perform these tasks.” This may be why it is difficult for some people to multitask - especially when one task involves speaking and the other involves thinking.

The way you use language shapes your attitude about the world around you. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf developed the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** to explain that language determines thought. People who speak different languages, or use language differently, think differently (Hussein, 2012; Lucy, 2010; Maxwell, 2004; Perlovsky, 2009; Sapir, 1958; Whorf, 1956). The argument

suggests that if a native English speaker had the exact same experiences in their life, but grew up speaking Chinese instead of English, their worldview would be different because of the different symbols used to make sense of the world.

When you label, describe, or evaluate events in your life, you use the symbols of the language you speak. Your use of these symbols to represent your reality influences your perspective and attitude about the world. So, it makes sense then that the more sophisticated your repertoire of symbols is, the more sophisticated your world view can be for you. Additionally, Boroditsky (2011) argues that if someone wants to learn another language and become fluent in it, she might have to change the way she behaves, especially in how she sorts things into categories and what she focuses on.

While the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is highly respected, there have been many scholarly and philosophical challenges to the viewpoint that language is what shapes our worldview. For example, Vicente and Martinez-Manrique (2008) argue that thoughts "demand a kind of completeness and stability of meaning that natural language sentences, being remarkably underdetermined, cannot provide" (Vicente & Martinez-Manrique, 2008, p. 397). It makes sense that something as arbitrary and complicated as the connection between thought and language is still being debated today.

Verbal communication is more than vocabulary; it's a tool for organizing life, defining who we are, and sharpening how we think. As you notice the categories you use, the labels you choose, and the stories you tell yourself, you'll see language steering attention and attitude. Put this into practice by revising one everyday description—make it more precise, less biased, or more open to multiple perspectives—and observe how that small language shift changes what you notice and how you feel.

Language Shapes Behavior

Naming and Identity

New parents/guardians typically spend a great deal of time trying to pick just the right name for their newborn. We know that names can impact other people's perceptions.[12] Our names impact how we feel and how we behave. For instance, if you heard that someone was named Alyssa, you might think that person was female, nice, and friendly, and you would be surprised if that person turned out to be male, mean, and aggressive. People with unusual names tend to have more emotional distress than those with common names.[13] Names impact our identity because others will typically have negative perceptions of unusual names or unique spellings of names.

For example, the Portia hypothesis proposes that women with traditionally masculine given names experience greater success in legal careers than women with traditionally feminine names, reflecting gendered bias in the profession. Coffey et al. (2009) tested this claim using South Carolina legal microdata and found "robust evidence that nominally masculine females are favored over other females" (p. 112): women in judgeships were more likely to have masculine-sounding names than other women in the legal field. The theory suggests that names can shape both the behavior of the named person and others' perceptions of that person's qualifications.

Figure 4.3.1 shows some of the more popular baby names for girls and boys, along with names that are non-binary.

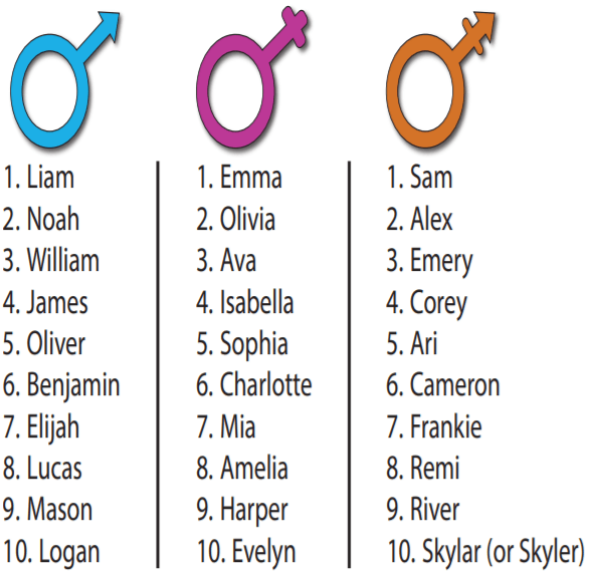


Figure 3.3.1: Popular Baby Names

Affiliation

When we want others to associate with us or have an **affiliation** with us, we might change the way we speak and the words we use. All of those things can impact how other people relate to us. Researchers found that when potential romantic partners employed the same word choices regarding pronouns and prepositions, then interest also increased. At the same time, couples that used similar word choices when texting each other significantly increased their relationship duration.[16] This study implies that we often inadvertently mimic other people's use of language when we focus on what they say.



Figure 3.3.1: Copy and Paste Caption here. (CPhoto by AllGo on Unsplash)

If you have been in a romantic relationship for a long period, you might create special expressions or jargon for the other person, and that specialized vocabulary can create greater closeness and understanding. The same line of thinking occurs for groups in a gang or persons in the military. If we adapt to the other person's communication style or **converge**, then we can also impact perceptions of affiliation. Research has shown that people who have similar speech also have more positive feelings for each other.[17] However, speech can also work in the opposite direction when we **diverge**, or when we communicate in a very different fashion. For instance, a group from another culture might speak the same dialect, even though they can speak English, in order to create distance and privacy from others.

Sexism and Racism

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

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

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

> In the United States and many other cultures, the color white often carries more positive connotations than the color black... Terms such as "Black Monday," "Black Plague", "black cats" and the "black market" all have negative connotations, and literature, television, and movies have traditionally portrayed heroes in white and villains in black. The empirical work of John E. Williams and others throughout the 1960s demonstrated that these positive and negative associations with the colors black and white, independent of any explicit connection to race, were evident among Black and White children as young as 3 years old ... as well as adults.[19]

Currently, there is an ongoing debate in the United States about whether President Trump's use of the phrase "Chinese Virus" when referring to the coronavirus was racially insensitive. The argument for its racial insensitivity is that the President is specifically using the term as an "other" technique to allow his followers to place blame on Chinese people for the coronavirus. Unsurprisingly, as a result of the use of the phase "Chinese Virus," there have been numerous violent attacks against individuals of Asian descent within the United States. Notice that we don't say people of Chinese descent here. The people that are generally inflamed by this rhetoric don't take the time to distinguish among people they label as "other."

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

Muted Group Theory

Muted group theory was initially developed to explain the way humans, specifically men and women, communicate.[20] The theory claims that man-made communication is, just that, "man"-made. Similar to standpoint theory, muted group theory argues that the dominant members of society, typically men, create a language and system of communication that subverts or reduces other groups, specifically women. Muted group theory has been described as feminist theory, and even this nomenclature is a great example of the claims that the theory is making.[21] The term "feminist" exists in a male-dominated culture and language and connotes a negative conception of that which it is used to describe. Even the fact that there is not a popular term used to describe those who fight for the rights and equal status of men, points to the fact that there is a problem. The word "feminist" exists because it deviates from what is perceived as the "norm." Even the terminology we use to describe women, and a theory that calls attention to their subversion, we see as even more subversion.

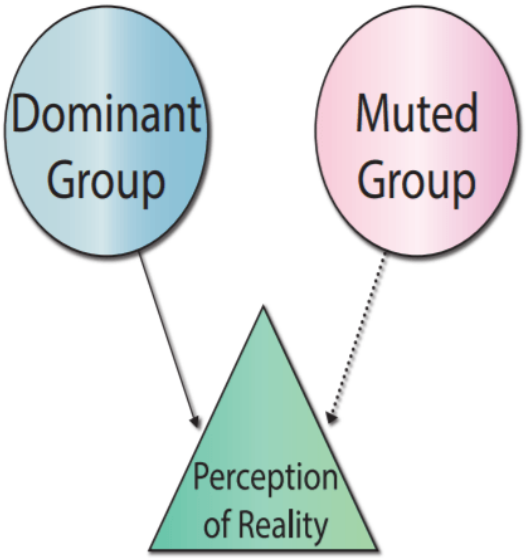


Figure 3.3.2: Muted Group Theory

Figure 4.3.2 represents the basic conceptualization of muted group theory. The blue circle represents the dominant group, and the solid arrow points to their perception of reality. Meanwhile, the pink circle represents the muted group, and the dashed line represents their perception of reality. Often what happens in society is that the dominant group's perception of reality is just seen as reality. As such, the muted group's perception of reality is seen as less than or more fanciful than the dominant group's perception. In reality, the muted group often sees things that really do exist in a society that the dominant group either cannot see or chooses not to see based on its position in society as the dominant group.

In short, words are cognitive tools: they sort experience, frame reality, and scaffold thinking. The categories you use and the labels you choose quietly steer judgments and decisions every day. Try this quick application: take one recent description you used ("That class was impossible," "I'm bad at group work") and rewrite it with more precise, neutral terms and one concrete detail. Notice how the reframed language changes what you pay attention to—and what actions feel possible next.

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3.4: Using Words Well

Using words well means aiming for three things at once: clarity, connection, and conscience. Clear language helps others understand exactly what you mean; affective language helps them feel why it matters; ethical language ensures your words do more good than harm—especially across differences in culture, identity, and power. In this section, you'll learn practical ways to be precise and concrete, to use emotion thoughtfully, to take responsibility for impact, to reduce cultural bias in everyday phrasing, and to recognize, reject, and respond to hate speech.

Seek Clarity, Connection, and Ethical Use

There is much we can do to hone our language so that what we say has the intended outcome: we can strive for clarity; seek affective resonances; and strive for ethical use.

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.

Using Words Affectively

Affective language refers to language used to express a person's feelings and create similar feelings in another person (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). Affective language can be intentionally used in relational contexts to create or enhance interpersonal bonds and can also be effectively employed in public speaking to engage an audience and motivate them in particular ways. We also use affective language spontaneously and less intentionally. People who "speak from the heart" connect well with others due to the affective nature of their words. Sometimes people become so filled with emotion that they have to express it, and these exclamations usually arouse emotions in others. Hearing someone exclaim, "I'm so happy!" can evoke similar feelings of joy, while hearing someone exclaim, "Why me!?" while sobbing conjures up similar feelings of sadness and frustration. There are also specific linguistic devices that facilitate affective communication.



Figure: Affective language expresses a person's feelings and creates similar feelings in another person. Marcia furman – spoken – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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. Be civil in your speech and take accountability for what you say, no matter your intent. Denounce hate speech and work to become aware of your own bias in language.

Understand 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. The following discussion also focuses on bias rather than preferred terminology or outright discriminatory language, which will be addressed more in the chapter titled "Culture and Communication", which

discusses culture and communication.

Race

People sometimes use euphemisms for race that illustrate bias because the terms are usually implicitly compared to the dominant group (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2010). For example, referring to a person as "urban" or a neighborhood as "inner city" can be an accurate descriptor, but when such words are used as a substitute for racial identity, they illustrate cultural biases that equate certain races with cities and poverty. Using adjectives like *articulate* or *well-dressed* in statements like "My black coworker is articulate" reinforces negative stereotypes even though these words are typically viewed as positive. Terms like *nonwhite* set up whiteness as the norm, which implies that white people are the norm against which all other races should be compared. Biased language also reduces the diversity within certain racial groups—for example, referring to anyone who looks like they are of Asian descent as Chinese or everyone who "looks" Latino/a as Mexicans. Some people with racial identities other than white, including people who are multiracial, use the label *person/people of color* to indicate solidarity among groups, but it is likely that they still prefer a more specific label when referring to an individual or referencing a specific racial group.

Gender

Language has a tendency to exaggerate perceived and stereotypical differences between men and women. The use of the term *opposite sex* presumes that men and women are opposites, like positive and negative poles of a magnet, which is obviously not true or men and women wouldn't be able to have successful interactions or relationships. A term like *other gender* doesn't presume opposites and acknowledges that male and female identities and communication are more influenced by gender, which is the social and cultural meanings and norms associated with males and females, than sex, which is the physiology and genetic makeup of a male and female. One key to avoiding gendered bias in language is to avoid the generic use of *he* when referring to something relevant to males and females. Instead, you can informally use a gender-neutral pronoun like *they* or *their* or you can use *his or her* (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2010). When giving a series of examples, you can alternate usage of masculine and feminine pronouns, switching with each example. We have lasting gendered associations with certain occupations that have tended to be male or female dominated, which erase the presence of both genders. Other words reflect the general masculine bias present in English. The following word pairs show the gender-biased term followed by an unbiased term: waitress/server, chairman / chair or chairperson, mankind/people, cameraman / camera operator, mailman / postal worker, sportsmanship / fair play. Common language practices also tend to infantilize women but not men, when, for example, women are referred to as *chicks*, *girls*, or *babes*. Since there is no linguistic equivalent that indicates the marital status of men before their name, using *Ms.* instead of *Miss* or *Mrs.* helps reduce bias.

Age

Language that includes age bias can be directed toward older or younger people. Descriptions of younger people often presume recklessness or inexperience, while those of older people presume frailty or disconnection. The term *elderly* generally refers to people over sixty-five, but it has connotations of weakness, which isn't accurate because there are plenty of people over sixty-five who are stronger and more athletic than people in their twenties and thirties. Even though it's generic, *older people* doesn't really have negative implications. More specific words that describe groups of older people include *grandmothers/grandfathers* (even though they can be fairly young too), *retirees*, or *people over sixty-five* (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2010). Referring to people over the age of eighteen as *boys* or *girls* isn't typically viewed as appropriate.



Age bias can appear in language directed toward younger or older people. Davide Mauro – Old and young – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Sexual Orientation

Discussions of sexual and affectional orientation range from everyday conversations to contentious political and personal debates. The negative stereotypes that have been associated with homosexuality, including deviance, mental illness, and criminal behavior, continue to influence our language use (American Psychological Association, 2012). Terminology related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) people can be confusing, so let's spend some time raise our awareness about preferred labels. First, *sexual orientation* is the term preferred to *sexual preference*. *Preference* suggests a voluntary choice, as in someone has a preference for cheddar or American cheese, which doesn't reflect the experience of most GLB people or research findings that show sexuality is more complex. You may also see *affectional orientation* included with *sexual orientation* because it acknowledges that GLB relationships, like heterosexual relationships, are about intimacy and closeness (affection) that is not just sexually based. Most people also prefer the labels *gay*, *lesbian*, or *bisexual* to *homosexual*, which is clinical and doesn't so much refer to an identity as a sex act. Conversely, the casual use of phrases like *that's gay* to mean "that's stupid" may create an environment in which GLB people do not feel comfortable. Even though people don't often use the phrase to actually refer to sexual orientation, campaigns like "ThinkB4YouSpeak.com" try to educate people about the power that language has and how we should all be more conscious of the words we use.

Ability

People with disabilities make up a diverse group that has increasingly come to be viewed as a cultural/social identity group. People without disabilities are often referred to as *able-bodied*. As with sexual orientation, comparing people with disabilities to "normal" people implies that there is an agreed-on definition of what "normal" is and that people with disabilities are "abnormal." *Disability* is also preferred to the word *handicap*. Just because someone is disabled doesn't mean he or she is also handicapped. The environment around them rather than their disability often handicaps people with disabilities (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2010). Ignoring the environment as the source of a handicap and placing it on the person fits into a pattern of reducing people with disabilities to their disability—for example, calling someone a paraplegic instead of a person with paraplegia. In many cases, as with sexual orientation, race, age, and gender, verbally marking a person as disabled isn't relevant and doesn't need spotlighting. Language used in conjunction with disabilities also tends to portray people as victims of their disability and paint pictures of their lives as gloomy, dreadful, or painful. Such descriptors are often generalizations or completely inaccurate.

Confront Hate Speech

Hate is a term that has many different meanings and can be used to communicate teasing, mild annoyance, or anger. The term *hate*, as it relates to hate speech, has a much more complex and serious meaning. *Hate* refers to extreme negative beliefs and

feelings toward a group or member of a group because of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or ability (Waltman & Haas, 2011). We can get a better understanding of the intensity of hate by distinguishing it from anger, which is an emotion that we experience much more regularly. First, anger is directed toward an individual, while hate is directed toward a social or cultural group. Second, anger doesn't prevent a person from having sympathy for the target of his or her anger, but hate erases sympathy for the target. Third, anger is usually the result of personal insult or injury, but hate can exist and grow even with no direct interaction with the target. Fourth, anger isn't an emotion that people typically find pleasure in, while hatred can create feelings of self-righteousness and superiority that lead to pleasure. Last, anger is an emotion that usually dissipates as time passes, eventually going away, while hate can endure for much longer (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Hate speech is a verbal manifestation of this intense emotional and mental state.

Hate speech is usually used by people who have a polarized view of their own group (the in-group) and another group (the out-group). Hate speech is then used to intimidate people in the out-group and to motivate and influence members of the in-group. Hate speech often promotes hate-based violence and is also used to solidify in-group identification and attract new members (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Perpetrators of hate speech often engage in totalizing, which means they define a person or a group based on one quality or characteristic, ignoring all others. A Lebanese American may be the target of hate speech because the perpetrators reduce him to a Muslim—whether he actually is Muslim or not would be irrelevant. Grouping all Middle Eastern- or Arab-looking people together is a dehumanizing activity that is typical to hate speech.

Incidents of hate speech and hate crimes have increased over the past fifteen years. Hate crimes, in particular, have gotten more attention due to the passage of more laws against hate crimes and the increased amount of tracking by various levels of law enforcement. The Internet has also made it easier for hate groups to organize and spread their hateful messages. As these changes have taken place over the past fifteen years, there has been much discussion about hate speech and its legal and constitutional implications. While hate crimes resulting in damage to a person or property are regularly prosecuted, it is sometimes argued that hate speech that doesn't result in such damage is protected under the US Constitution's First Amendment, which guarantees free speech. Just recently, in 2011, the Supreme Court found in the *Snyder v. Phelps* case that speech and actions of the members of the Westboro Baptist Church, who regularly protest the funerals of American soldiers with signs reading things like "Thank God for Dead Soldiers" and "Fag Sin = 9/11," were protected and not criminal. Chief Justice Roberts wrote in the decision, "We cannot react to [the Snyder family's] pain by punishing the speaker. As a nation we have chosen a different course—to protect even hurtful speech on public issues to ensure that we do not stifle public debate" (Exploring Constitutional Conflicts, 2012).

Every message you send is a small choice with real effects. When you slow down to clarify your point, choose feelings-words that fit your purpose, and check for bias or harm, you make communication that others can understand, trust, and act on. As a quick habit, before you hit send or speak up: replace one vague term with a concrete example, soften or sharpen tone to match your goal, and remove any unnecessary identity labels. Over time, these small edits build clearer thinking, stronger relationships, and a more respectful communication climate.

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3.5: Chapter 3 Summary

Verbal Communication Review

Big idea

- Verbal communication is an agreed-upon, rule-governed system of symbols (spoken, written, and signed words) used to share meaning. Because words are arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract, shared rules and context are essential for understanding.

Core concepts

- Symbols:
  - Arbitrary (no natural link: “cat” ≠ cat), Ambiguous (multiple meanings: “last slide”), Abstract (represent ideas/objects, not the thing itself).
- Rule systems:
  - Phonology: sounds/pronunciation (read vs. read).
  - Semantics: meanings (denotation vs. connotation; “sick” = ill vs. awesome).
  - Syntax: arrangement/structure (word order makes messages intelligible).
  - Pragmatics: use-in-context (audience, setting, norms affect word choice).

Spoken vs. written communication

- Formality: speech is generally more informal; writing more formal. Tech (texts, DMs) blurs lines.
- Synchronicity: speech is usually real-time; writing is often delayed—except live chats.
- Permanence/recording: writing is often archived; speech usually isn’t—unless recorded/social platforms.
- Privacy: assume anything digital can be saved, shared, or resurfaced.

Functions of verbal communication

- Reality construction: labels and evaluations frame experiences (“rain ruined the day” vs. “great time with friends”).
- Categorization: language sorts complex life into usable groups (friend, colleague, stranger).
- Cognition: language supports memory, planning, reasoning; influences attention and problem-solving.
- Language–thought link: Sapir-Whorf—language influences thought/worldview (not strict determinism).

Power of language

- Naming and identity: names shape impressions and self-feelings; trends carry cultural signals.
- Affiliation: convergence (matching style) increases connection; divergence marks distance/identity.
- Bias in language: avoid sexist/racist/ableist/ageist phrasing (use firefighter, chair, people of color when appropriate, able-bodied, older people).
- Muted Group Theory: dominant groups shape language norms, potentially marginalizing others.
- Accommodation and code-switching: adjusting rate, word choice, dialect, or language to fit context; be mindful of power and bias pressures.

Using words well

- Clarity: prefer concrete words; define terms; cut fluff; explain/limit jargon; one main point + example.
- Affective skill: match tone to purpose; use vivid but appropriate imagery; avoid manipulative hype.
- Ethics: be civil; separate facts/inferences/judgments; use “I” language; consider short- and long-term impact; denounce hate speech.

Tech and privacy reminders

- Email/texts/DMs feel like talk but act like writing: searchable, shareable, and often permanent.
- Quick check before sending: Would this still represent me if forwarded/screenshot?

Mini checklist (apply now)

- Replace one abstract term with a concrete example.
- Swap any biased label for a neutral, relevant descriptor.
- Adjust tone (softer or sharper) to fit goal and audience.
- Ensure your request or main point is explicit in one sentence.

Quick self-test

1. Name the four language rule systems.
2. Give one example each of arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract symbols.
3. List the four differences between spoken and written communication.
4. Rewrite this biased phrase inclusively: “The chairman needs two strong guys to help the elderly.”
5. Briefly explain how convergence can improve affiliation in a text exchange.

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4: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

4.1: Introduction to Nonverbal Communication
4.2: Nonverbal Channels
4.3: Functions of Nonverbal Communication
4.4: Nonverbal Communication Competence
4.5: Chapter 4 Summary

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4.1: Introduction to Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- define nonverbal communication and metacommunication; explain ambiguity, context, and culture.
- identify and apply major channels—kinesics, paralanguage, haptics, space/territoriality, chronemics, and artifacts.
- analyze functions (duplicate, replace, complement, accent, regulate, contradict) in real-life scenarios.
- demonstrate congruent, credible nonverbals and adapt cross-culturally.

Defining Nonverbal Communication

Your partner flashes a big smile when you surprise them for their birthday, even though they secretly are embarrassed. You send an emoji "face with tears of joy" to your BFF after getting a good grade on a rhetorical criticism paper. You kiss someone on a first date. What do these scenarios have in common? Nonverbal communication of course -- an essential but frequently misunderstood dimension of interpersonal relations (Gifford, 2011). **Nonverbal communication** is often simply defined as communication without words. Others have noted that nonverbal communication includes "all behaviors that are not words" (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006, p. 4). Regardless of the deceiving simplicity of its definition, know that nonverbal communication is very complex.

In everyday life, nonverbal communication is multimodal and multifunctional in nature serving many functions. It is closely linked to how we feel about our relationships with others and how we manage those relationships. In interpersonal interaction, nonverbal messages can be found in facial expressions, eyes, body language, touching as well as clothing, tone of voice, posture and even spatial distance. Indeed, you can say a lot without saying anything, or as psychologist and philosopher Paul Watzlawick (1978) observed in the first axiom of his interpersonal communication theory that you cannot not communicate. The inevitability of sending and receiving messages is extremely important to understand because it means that each of us is a type of "transmitter" that cannot be shut off. Nonverbal behaviors are implicated in messages of intimacy, arousal and composure, dominance, formal, and task or social orientation. Whether intentional or unintentional, deceitful or sincere, no matter what we do, we give off information about ourselves. In short, nonverbal communication is an important part of human interaction and always present in face-to-face interactions.

A related concept is what social scientists call **metacommunication** -- communicating *about* communication. In interpersonal relationships, it involves how people perceive you, not just your words. For example, if I say, "Nice to see you!" to someone and roll my eyes at the same time, they will likely doubt my sincerity.

This example illustrates one of the more interesting effects of nonverbal messages: most people tend to believe the nonverbal message over the verbal message if the two appear to be in disagreement (Knapp, 1972; Knapp, Earnest, Griffin, & McGlone, 2020; Malandro & Barker, 1983; Mehrabian, 1981). People seem to believe that actions really do speak louder than words. As a result, they place a disproportionate emphasis on the nonverbal response -- therefore it's always a good idea to make nonverbal behavior *consistent* with our verbal messages (Hackman & Johnson, 2000).

So, welcome to the world of nonverbal communication. Its types, its contexts, and its impacts -- all of these will be explored in the pages that follow.

The Process

Is nonverbal communication its own type of language? Yes and no. Like language, the fundamental process of nonverbal communication consists of a message encoded in a selected medium (body language, for example) that is then decoded. When you form language and speak it, your brain encodes a thought into words and intelligible sounds. For example, if you want to tell someone to leave the room, you can simply speak the words, "Please leave the room." Nonverbally, you can also encode an extra layer of "illustration" -- for example, first pointing at the person and then at the door.

Some forms of nonverbal communication are emblematic in nature, where the performance stands for a concrete idea. **Emblems** are gestures like pointing, giving a thumbs up, or signing “OK” in specific contexts where those gestures are intelligible. Other nonverbal emblems include wearing a uniform to indicate team membership or sporting a tattoo that has a literal, unambiguous meaning. The most famous emblem of all, of course, may be the infamous “middle finger.”

However, not all nonverbal communication is emblematic. If you sway in your chair during a lecture, the meaning of that behavior may not be immediately obvious. Perhaps you need to go to the bathroom. Maybe you’re just restless. You could even be doing light exercises to help stay awake. Without asking you, any interpretation would be tentative -- a guess. In fact, you might not even know the answer to what your behavior means. It turns out that some people perform nonverbal gestures without realizing them. When some people speak before an audience, for example, they might look down a lot, move their legs a lot, or put their hands behind their backs -- all without realizing it. These are “adaptive” behaviors designed to subconsciously help the speaker feel better (more comfortable) about the situation they’re in.

How aware (or not) someone is of their nonverbal behavior raises the important question of *intention*. Certainly, some aspects of nonverbal are intentionally performed. Chances are, your clothing and hairstyle at the moment you’re reading this were intentional choices, but what about your posture and the position of your hands and arms? There are aspects of nonverbal communication that we may convey without meaning to. Goffman (1952) called the intentional aspects of nonverbal performance as “cues given” and the unintentional aspects as “cues given off.” Whether intentional or not, these cues can be communicated via a variety of “media” (all of them associated with you) -- your eyes, smell, tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures to name a few. Increasing your competence in nonverbal communication means learning to pay more attention to these unintentional aspects.

The Impact

You might have heard that 93% of communication is nonverbal. That figure comes from a famous study by Merhabian and Ferris (1967). Participants in their study were read aloud single words that they previously rated as either positive, neutral, or negative on-paper. When they were read aloud, they were read vocal tones that were previously rated as either neutral or positive. Then the experiment was repeated using facial cues, where the experimenter read the words while displaying certain facial cues (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967). Mehrabian utilized the results to calculate the listener’s *perceived* attitudes, which were a combination of three cues in the following proportion: 7% verbal, 38% vocal (tone), and 55% facial expression.

Notice that these studies were focused on the utterance of single words, not complete sentences within a context. We know that our typical social interactions occur in contexts of complete thoughts and actions, not just single words. These studies, therefore, face issues with external validity (the ability to apply to actual social situations). This criticism (among others concerning sample size and possible participant biases) was expressed by Burgoon, Woodall, and Ferris (1989). Though you may hear the 93% number frequently expressed in popular culture, you now know that this is based on a very limited study. So if it isn’t 93%, how much of communication is nonverbal? The only thing that scholars agree on is that it *matters*, and that it matters in many contexts. I

Differences Between Verbal Communication and Nonverbal Communication

Verbal and nonverbal behaviors work together within our communication package in complementary ways, yet each has characteristics not shared with the other.

- Nonverbal communication is **more ambiguous**; thus, it is more context dependent. Because most nonverbal gestures and actions are less well defined than the words, we get a sense of what those variables mean only within the broader context of other nonverbal clues and the verbal communication. While words can stand alone, we cannot take nonverbal clues in isolation; rather, we must see them as part of the whole package, and we must use all the incoming stimuli to generate a more accurate interpretation.
- Nonverbal is **continuous and inevitable**. Because of nonverbal communication, "we cannot not communicate." Although we can quit sending verbal messages, we never stop sending nonverbal messages such as appearance, posture, or overall demeanor. Even if we are totally unaware of being observed, we are sending messages. Our absence can even have communication value. If a person is noticeably missing at a meeting or a party, the others may speculate about the absence and what is going on; in other words, not being present also sends messages. The lack of a reply to a text may stimulate all sorts of messages.
- Nonverbal is **more multi-channeled**. We have five senses, and all of the senses can be used to experience nonverbal clues.

Verbal communication primarily relies on hearing (in oral communication) or sight (in reading). Nonverbal communication clues can be smelled, tasted, touched, seen, or heard.

- Nonverbal is **more emotionally revealing**. Although phrases such as "I'm angry" can give the listener a broad sense of what the speaker means, it is the addition of the nonverbal communication, the vocal characteristics, posture, and eye contact, which really gives us a sense of just how angry the person is. The verbal communication points the listener in the direction of the speaker's thoughts, but the nonverbal "paints the picture," adding the richness and nuances of what they mean.
- Nonverbal is **more believable**. Realistically, telling a lie verbally is quite easy; however, demonstrating a lie with all our nonverbal traits is far more difficult. Hence, we tend to assume that when we receive a mixed message, the nonverbal communication is the true or accurate message. The sheer amount of nonverbal can overwhelm the verbal.



Figure 4.1.1: Image 1

- Nonverbal is **more culturally specific**. Languages can change from culture to culture, but nonverbal communication changes to an even higher degree. How words are said, vocal patterns, gestures, distance, and other factors vary to a much greater degree between cultures. For example, in the Middle East, it is more common for men in platonic relationships to engage in behaviors such as handholding and kissing. The famous photo of President Bush and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah holding hands illustrates how important knowledge of these cultural differences can be for successful interaction (Graham, 2007) . In Image 2, the U.S. gesture for "okay" means different things in different countries:

U.S. – “okay”
France – “zero,” or “worthless
Japan – “money”
Germany and Brazil – vulgarity

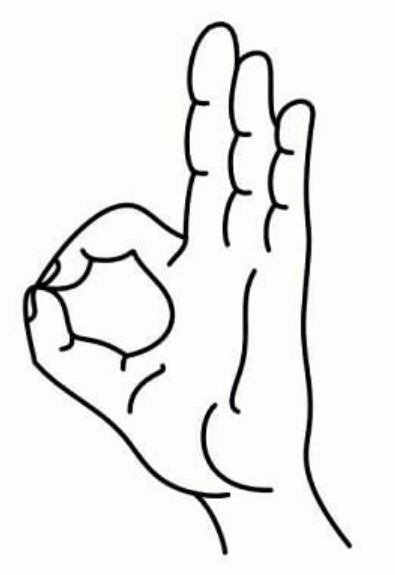


Figure 4.1.2: Image 2

From Verderber, Interact 14th ed, 2016.

Even something as simple as smiling can vary by culture. In Marina Krakovsky's (2009) article, "Global Psyche: National Poker Face," she reports on how smiling is viewed differently in Russia than in the U.S. She states, "Just as Americans mistake Russian reserve for surliness, Russians find friendly American smiles phony" (para. 5). In *The Prague Visitor*, 2017, July (Image 3), Americans are advised to alter their smiles to better fit into the Czech culture (p. 11).



THUMBS UP

Watch your fingers if you want to indicate how many of something you'd like to order. Czechs count with their thumbs first, using their thumb and first finger for two, thumb and two fingers for three, etc. So yes, that scene in the film Inglourious Basterds, when an American spy is found out by raising his first two fingers to order two whiskeys, is 100% accurate.

DRESS FOR THE PART

If you see a cyclist pass you on the street in a helmet and matching logo-covered spandex, don't assume they're training for a professional race. They may just be on their way home from work. Czechs often dress head-to-toe for whatever activity they are participating in at the moment. Every hiker's closet will have boots, hiking trousers, waterproof jackets, and all of the outdoor gear that could possibly come in handy in the forest (in a backpack, of course). This trend extends to more formal situations as well, meaning that you'll often find symphony, theater, and ballet audiences dressed in jackets and ties or dresses and heels.

USA SMILE CZECH SMILE

TONE DOWN YOUR SMILE

One way to spot the foreigner among Czechs in any photo is a big toothy grin. The Czech smile is often a slight upturn of closed lips. The average resting face may even appear upset at first glance, but this is just because smiles are reserved for sincere interactions. And don't be put off by a downturned frown with what could be mistaken for a disapproving "hmmph" when speaking with locals. This is just the sound of active listening among Czechs.

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Figure 4.1.3: Image 3

Perceptions of time also vary by culture. According to Rick Vecchio (2007), in the nation of Peru, the movement, "La Hora sin Demora," attempted to move from a highly polychronic mindset to a more monochronic mindset. However, such perceptions of time "may be too ingrained to change" (para. 3).

Nonverbal cues don't just decorate our words—they steer how we're understood. When your face, voice, posture, and space align with your message (and the culture you're in), you gain clarity, credibility, and connection. Read on to become fluent in this language you've been speaking all along.

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4.2: Nonverbal Channels

Before you speak, your body is already in conversation. The tilt of your head, the pace of your voice, the way you take up space, even the scent of your shampoo—all of it sends signals. In this section, we'll tour the major "silent channels" of communication—body language, voice, space, time, and touch—and show how small choices can reshape first impressions, relationships, and everyday interactions. Nonverbal communication is a significant and powerful venue of communication. It is a large, all-encompassing area, and accordingly, the definition for nonverbal is quite broad. Nonverbal communication is *any nonlinguistic variable stimulating meaning in the receiver*. Any communicative component, other than language, that stimulates some sort of message in the minds of the receivers is part of nonverbal communication. We'll explore some of the more common and interesting components.

Kinesics

Kinesics refers to *body language*. We communicate significantly through our facial expressions, eye contact, hand gestures, body posture. Consider, too, how much emphasis we put on appearance in American culture. That is because how we adorn ourselves contributes to the messages of communication we send. There are a variety of kinesics:

- **Facial expression:** Our faces are extremely expressive, and our faces alone account for approximately 55% of our communication package, so clearly, facial expression is a significant message source. Our facial expressions work with a combination of three areas of the face: the forehead; the structures around the eyes; and the structures around the mouth. We change the positioning of these three areas to express a wide range of emotions. While virtually all nonverbal communication is cultural, there are six facial expressions known to be universal: anger, fear, disgust, sadness, happiness, and surprise (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2011).



Figure 4.2.4: Image 4

- **Eye contact:** In American culture, eye contact during conversation is expected, and a failure to make eye contact in western culture carries negative connotations of being shy, lying, or lacking confidence. We also use eye contact to psychologically diminish distance. By catching a person's eye, even across a room, we have momentarily shrunk the physical space and replaced it with a psychological connection. That is why eye contact in public speaking is so important; it pulls the audience and the speaker together. The eyes and the structures around the eyes are quite emotionally expressive. If a person's eyes seem half-open, we may see them as tired, sad, or depressed. If they are wide open, we may see them as energetic, excited, or confident.
- **Hand gestures:** Many of us "talk with our hands." It is normal and typical to move our hands as we speak. We employ a range of hand gestures, from the simple flip of a hand to very specific, emblematic gestures. In public speaking, novice speakers often try to avoid hand gestures; however, since gesturing is so usual, such an effort only causes the speaker to look even more uncomfortable and unnatural.
- **Body posture:** We tend to correlate body posture with degrees of confidence. Generally, we assume people who stand erect with shoulders back are more self-assured than those standing slumped over. The same is true for when seated. Teachers

regularly see students laid back in their chairs, and they tend to assume the students, due to that posture, are not as attentive or involved as others.

- **Body artifacts:** We decorate our bodies. We see *National Geographic* specials on primitive cultures, and may be fascinated by how they use paint or imbedded objects to decorate themselves. Americans do exactly the same thing, but it is more difficult to see it in ourselves. It is always easier to observe and judge others. **Body artifacts** are *the items we use to decorate our bodies in a variety of ways, depending on the situation*. These include:
  - clothing
  - hair
  - jewelry/body piercings/tattoos
  - scent
  - makeup



Figure 4.2.5: Image 5

We manipulate and alter the artifacts depending on the situation. We look at the situation, determine how we want to be perceived, and then select/alter artifacts in an attempt to trigger the sort of response we desire. For some, we are much less self-reflexive (aware of what we are doing). Spending the day at home, on a free Saturday, does not demand much attention to artifacts. However, for other situations, like a job interview or big date, we are highly self-reflexive, carefully planning how we present ourselves.

Paralanguage

Verbal communication addresses only the dynamics of language itself. Factors about our voice, pitch, rate, and volume are part of paralanguage. **Paralanguage** refers to *vocal characteristics*. There are a variety of vocal factors to consider.

- **Pitch:** Pitch is *how high or low one's voice is*. As we know, males tend to have a lower pitch, and women tend to have a higher pitch. Most of us have few problems with pitch. However, a problem can arise when one's pitch is out of the norm, such as a male with a high pitch, or a woman with a low pitch. Others may make assumptions about the person based on their pitch.
- **Rate:** Rate refers to *how quickly we speak*. The average speaking rate is about 125-150 words per minute (Sprague, 2014) and for most us, we rarely have rate issues. However, if a person speaks much faster, we often assume they are nervous or lacking confidence. On the other end, those who speak very slowly may be seen as mentally slow, boring, or dull.
- **Volume:** Volume is *how loudly we speak*. The majority of us do not have volume issues. However, a person who speaks too softly may be seen as uncertain or less confident. A person speaking too loudly may be seen as overbearing and obnoxious. As public speakers, one skill we must learn is how to adapt our volume to the specific physical context, speaking loudly enough for the whole audience to hear without overpowering the front row.
- **Quality:** The quality of our voice refers to *how smooth or harsh we sound*. As with most variables, most of the time we do not have any problems. However, someone with a very harsh voice may be difficult to understand, or someone with a very smooth voice may be seen as untrustworthy.
- **Articulation:** Articulation is *our ability to make the sounds of the language*. Every language has a **phonetic alphabet**. The

phonetic alphabet is *the collection of sounds a person needs to use to speak that language*. American English, has about 40 sounds in its phonetic alphabet (University of Oregon, 2013). While some of the sounds for English may also be used in other languages, there are differences in the phonetic alphabets as we move from one language to another.

- **Enunciation**: Enunciation refers to *how clearly we speak*. Articulation is the ability to make the sounds; enunciation is how well we do it. A person who mumbles probably does not have an articulation problem, but they are not choosing to enunciate clearly. For others to understand us, we must enunciate appropriately to send crisp, clear messages.
- **Pronunciation**: Pronunciation refers to *making the correct sounds for the word*. We must speak the words correctly or others may infer we are not sure of what we are saying. As a public speaker, correct pronunciation is important to maintain a high level of credibility. Fortunately, with the internet, we can access sources, like Merriam Webster online, where we can read about the word and also hear the correct pronunciation.
- **Disfluencies**. Disfluencies are *words or sounds that interrupt the smooth flow of the symbols*. These are the classic sounds such as "uh," "um," and "ah." Disfluencies also include identifiable words when they are not used for their meaning. Common ones include "like," "you know," "I mean," "okay," "whatever," and so on. We use these disfluencies because in our culture, silence is usually perceived rather negatively. We fill the silence with disfluencies to indicate we are thinking, to maintain control of the conversation, or to give us a moment to think of what to say.

Space

We use the space around us to send numerous messages, which can significantly impact the type and quality of communication occurring. There are two variables to consider: territoriality and proxemics.

Territoriality

Humans are territorial creatures because we like to feel we have control over our space. **Territoriality**, refers to *our ownership of space*. Whether we actually own the space in a legal, financial sense is not as important as a feeling of ownership. Homeowners understandably have a strong sense of ownership of their home and feel very protective toward it. Faculty have a sense of ownership of their office, even though the college or university actually owns it. Our territories can be large such as acres of land, or as small as a side of the bed or a dresser drawer. One common situation students experience involves where they sit in class. Most students will sit in the same place all semester, unless forced to change. Even though they know they can sit elsewhere in the room, they may experience a moment of uncertainty upon entering the class and seeing someone in their chair. The power of territoriality is quite strong.

Just like other animals, we mark our territory. We do, however, employ somewhat cleaner methods of doing so. **Central markers** are *placed in the space to let others know we claim the space as ours*. Nathan enters the classroom a few minutes early, places his books on a desk, and then leaves to go to the restroom. His books are a marker claiming that desk as his. The chance of anyone moving Nathan's marker is pretty low. **Boundary markers** *identify the edges of territory*. Fences and hedges serve as boundary markers for one's property. If a number of people are sitting around a table, they will have imaginary boundary markers, dividing the space for everyone's use. Finally, **ear markers** *label our space*. Nameplates on doors or an address on a house serve as ear markers. Teenagers may have a sign on their bedroom door, emphasizing it is their space and should be respected.



Figure 4.2.7: Image 7

The nature of our territory can communicate important messages about ourselves. There are several variables that come into play:

- **Size**: Generally, we associate larger territory with more power and less territory with less power. Consider what is needed to have a lot of territory: money. In U.S. culture, money and power are virtually synonymous. In corporations, battles may occur over who gets the larger office because we clearly link territory size and power.
- **Location**: Where the territory is located can be important. Most communities have "rich" parts of town and the "poor" parts, the proverbial "other side of the tracks." Parents may ask where their child's friends live to use as a clue about what the family may be like. In addition, we generally assume those who work on the upper floors of an office building have more power.
- **Control of Access***:* The more control we have over who can access our territory, and when they can access it, may show we have more power. People who own their own home have more control of access than people who share an apartment with roommates. Executives in large corporations may have two or three assistants who control who gets an appointment or may have an office on a floor accessible only by a special elevator or code.
- **Arrangement/Artifacts**: Just as we use artifacts to alter our appearance, we also decorate our space with artifacts, such as furniture, wall hangings, carpets, paints, and knickknacks. The types of artifacts we select, and how we arrange the artifacts, sends messages about who lives in the space. This is a multi-billion-dollar industry in the U.S.; every furniture, paint, drapery, and flooring store feeds our need to make spaces our own. We also read into these artifacts. Consider what a person might think of someone simply by looking at their bedroom. What would they think of the person living in that space?

Proxemics

In addition to being territorial and wanting to feel we "own" space, we also use space in another manner, called **proxemics**. Proxemics refers to *the distance between people*. We have all experienced someone standing too close to us, making us feel uncomfortable because they "invaded our space." According to Edward Hall (Griffin, 2013), the U.S. American culture has four "zones" with which we work.

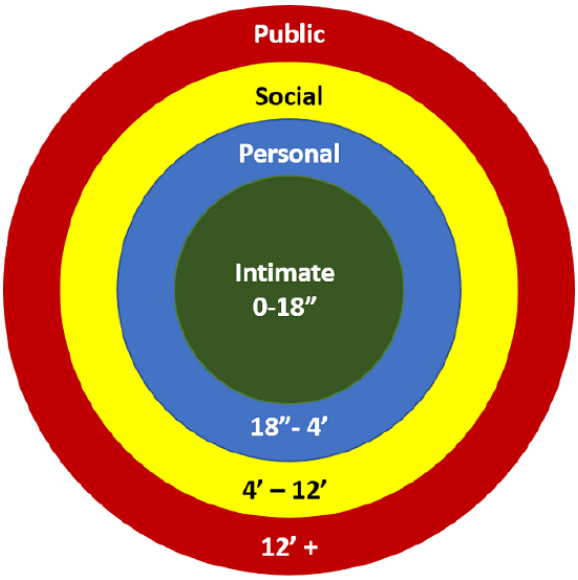


Figure 4.2.8: Image 8

1. The **intimate zone** *ranges from touching to about 18*". We reserve this level of physical closeness for those with whom we have a strong emotional relationship and for those with whom we have a high level of trust. Except for occasional handshakes and hugs, there are few people we let remain in our intimate zone for very long.

2.The **personal zone** *ranges from about 18*" *to about 4 feet*. This is the zone we use for friends and for those with whom we interact on a regular basis, but with whom we do not have a close, emotional relationship, and for whom touch is not a typical part of the relationship.

3.The **social zone** *ranges from about 4 feet to about 12 feet* (although the distances are much more vague at this point). Our "neutral" zone is used for those with whom we have to interact, but with whom we have no established relationship. This is our business or more formal distance.

4.**The public zone** is 12 feet and larger. We keep this distance between us and anyone who, or anything that, makes us uncomfortable. We want to keep as much distance as we realistically can.

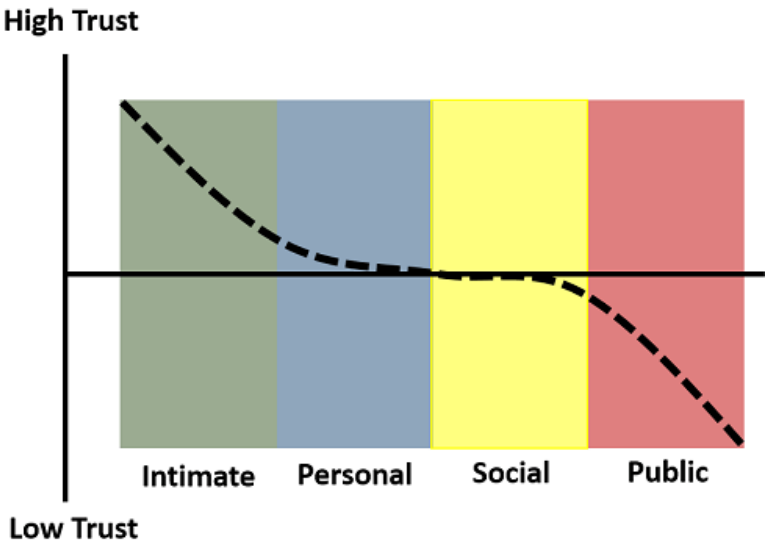


Figure 4.2.9: Image 9

All the zones are related to emotional closeness and trust. As the trust increases, the comfortableness with physical closeness increases. We do not feel as threatened so we allow them to get closer to us.

If our space gets violated, which it frequently does, we definitely notice it. It is a powerful type of external noise. It is so powerful, a violation usually shifts the focus from the conversation to the violation, and until the violation is corrected, it is very difficult for us to resume our focus on the conversation. This does not mean we stop talking to move; rather, we usually try to keep talking, but the proxemic violation severely interferes with our focus on the conversation. We will try to move or use a substitute to re-establish a comfortable distance, but until the proxemic violation is rectified, it is foremost in our minds.

Proxemics are highly cultural. While our U.S. “personal” zone is 18”-4’, in the Middle East, it is 8-12”, much smaller than we are accustomed to (Changing Minds, 2013). It is important for people engaging in intercultural exchanges, such as politicians, business people, or even just tourists, to realize those differences to avoid potentially embarrassing or insulting situations.

Chronemics

Chronemics refers to our *perception and use of time*. Chronemics is not about time itself; rather, it is how we view and interact with time. Perceptions of time vary among individuals and extensively among cultures. Americans are notoriously time-fixated. We see time as a commodity, like money, something to be spent wisely. Other cultures are much more relaxed about time.

Americans see time as **monochronic.** We see time being a linear progression, and once time has passed, it is gone. We are generally very concerned about scheduling our time carefully, since we time as a resource to be spent wisely. We have seen an explosion of the use of day planners, calendar apps, and other time management tools. Just like using home budgeting programs for money, we use tools to budget our time.



Figure 4.2.10: Image 10

Many other cultures see time differently. They see time as **polychronic.** In these cultures, time is much more fluid, flexible, and less absolute. Multiple events may be "scheduled" at one time, but the person attends whichever seems most important. Less concern is given to punctuality, and more to addressing whichever events and needs are most important. In monochronic cultures, people have a tendency to let schedule control action, while in a polychronic culture, people control action. They are not driven by a calendar or schedule.

There are three variables of chronemics that illustrate how we see time differently:

- **Punctuality** is *our perception of what it means to be "on time."* We all have experienced individuals and situations where differences in punctuality had the potential to cause conflict.
- **Duration** is *our perception of how long something should last*. We learn to expect events to be of certain lengths. Movies, meetings, classes, and so on have lengths we have come to expect as normal. When we feel the duration has been exceeded, we get anxious and are ready for the event to be finished.
- **Activity** is *our perception of what occurs at what time of day, and how much should occur in a given time frame*. Most of us assume at 3 a.m. we are sleeping. We associate that time with a specific activity. Of course, those associations will vary. For some, 10 p.m. is an appropriate bed time, while others laugh at the idea of going to bed so early. Some feel that getting out

of bed at 10 a.m. is horrendously late and irresponsible. Some of us are high activity; we like to see a lot happen. Some are low activity; we like things slower paced. Classes are good examples. Teachers who pack an enormous amount of material, covered quickly, into a short time frame, are high activity. Teachers, who are the opposite, are more low activity, covering very little in a time frame; working their way more deliberately and slowly through material. Another classic example of this difference is vacationing. A high activity person vacationing with a low activity person is often a recipe for conflict. The high activity vacationer will be up early, with a planned and scheduled day, and anxious to do as much as possible. While the low activity person will want to sleep in, do whatever seems interesting at the moment, and just "go with the flow."

If individuals have different chronemic mind-sets, conflict can occur. The assumptions and expectations vary, thus, we have disagreements over what should happen. We make assumptions about others based on their use of time. The low activity teacher may be seen as "boring," and "dull" to some, while others may like the pace. The high activity teacher may be seen by some as "frantic" and "hyper," while others like the faster pace. People who have a strong sense of punctuality may be seen as either "uptight" or "responsible," depending on the other person's point of view.

Haptics

Haptics refers to *touch*. Touch is the most powerful and basic form of communication. Nothing replaces the power of touch.

The offense of a rude comment pales in comparison to the offense of an inappropriate touch. Touch is such a big issue we have laws defining some touch as illegal; there are few laws regulating personal comments. The irony is, as humans, we need to be touched. We have experienced moments when a hug or a touch said far more than any language. The intimacy a loving couple experiences in sex cannot be replicated by any sort of language.



Figure 4.2.11: Image 11

Where we can touch another person, and when we can touch them, is directly related to the nature of the relationship. Most of us have experienced the growth and development of the physical aspect of an intimate relationship. Through trial and error, experimentation, and even talk, we determine a comfort level of touch for each relationship. The level of touch will change as the relationship changes, but generally we consider the progression of the touch rules to moderately correspond to the progression of the emotional relationship.

As with proxemics, a violation of touch rules shifts the focus to that violation, often to a much more extreme degree than with proxemics. Until the violation is resolved in some fashion, it is difficult, if not impossible, to continue the conversation with any real sense of concentration. For minor violations, simply backing off, increasing distance, and/or apologizing may resolve the issue. For serious violations, relationships may end, law enforcement may be involved, or jobs may be lost.

Nonverbal cues don't just color your message—they can carry it. When you become intentional about how you move, sound, occupy space, manage time, and touch, you gain control over how others read you—and how you read them. Master these channels and you'll communicate with more clarity, credibility, and connection, even before a single word leaves your mouth.

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4.3: Functions of Nonverbal Communication

You learned that we use verbal communication to express ideas, emotions, experiences, thoughts, objects, and people. Words carry meaning, but they rarely travel alone. A nod that seals a “yes,” a pointed finger that says “come here,” a long pause that opens the floor, or a tense jaw that betrays “I’m fine”—these nonverbal moves shape how messages land, often more powerfully than sentences do. In the pages ahead, you’ll see how nonverbal cues can duplicate, replace, complement, accent, regulate, or even contradict what we say—and how they also reveal emotions, signal relationships, and reflect cultural norms. Learning to read and use these functions turns everyday interactions into clearer, more intentional communication.

Duplicate

We use nonverbal communication to duplicate verbal communication. When we use nonverbal communication to duplicate, we use nonverbal communication that is recognizable to most people within a particular cultural group. Obvious examples include a head-nod or a head-shake to duplicate the verbal messages of “yes” or “no.” If someone asks if you want to go to a movie, you might verbally answer “yes” and at the same time nod your head. This accomplishes the goal of duplicating the verbal message with a nonverbal message. Interestingly, the head nod is considered a “nearly universal indication of accord, agreement, and understanding” because the same muscle in the head nod is the same one a baby uses to lower its head to accept milk from its mother’s breast (Givens).

Replace

We use nonverbal communication to replace verbal communication. If someone asks you a question, instead of a verbal reply “yes” and a head-nod, you may choose to simply nod your head without the accompanying verbal message. When we replace verbal communication with nonverbal communication, we use nonverbal behaviors that are easily recognized by others such as a wave, head-nod, or head-shake. Consider how universal shaking the head side-to-side is as an indicator of disbelief, disapproval, and negation. This nonverbal act is used by human babies to refuse food or drink; rhesus monkeys, baboons, bonnet macaques and gorillas turn their faces sideways in aversion; and children born deaf/blind head shake to refuse objects or disapprove of touch (Givens).

Complement

We use nonverbal cues to complement verbal communication. If a friend tells you that she recently received a promotion and a pay raise, you can show your enthusiasm in a number of verbal and nonverbal ways. If you exclaim, “Wow, that’s great! I’m so happy for you!” while at the same time smiling and hugging your friend, you are using nonverbal communication to complement what you are saying. Unlike duplicating or replacing, nonverbal communication that complements cannot be used alone without the verbal message. If you simply smiled and hugged your friend without saying anything, the interpretation of that nonverbal communication would be more ambiguous than using it to complement your verbal message.

Accent

We use nonverbal communication to accent verbal communication. While nonverbal communication complements verbal communication, we also use it to accent verbal communication by emphasizing certain parts of the verbal message. For instance, you may be upset with a family member and state, “I’m very angry with you.” To accent this statement nonverbally you might say it, “I’m VERY angry with you,” placing your emphasis on the word “very” to demonstrate the magnitude of your anger. In this example, it is your tone of voice (paralanguage) that serves as the nonverbal communication that accents the message. Parents might tell their children to “come here.” If they point to the spot in front of them dramatically, they are accenting the “here” part of the verbal message.

Regulate

We use nonverbal communication to regulate verbal communication. Generally, it is pretty easy for us to enter, maintain,

and exit our interactions with others nonverbally. Rarely, if ever, would we approach a person and say, “I’m going to start a conversation with you now. Okay, let’s begin.” Instead, we might make eye contact, move closer to the person, or face the person directly — all nonverbal behaviors that indicate our desire to interact. Likewise, we do not generally end conversations by stating, “I’m done talking to you now” unless there is a breakdown in the communication process. We are generally proficient enacting nonverbal communication such as looking at our watch, looking in the direction we wish to go, or being silent to indicate an impending end in the conversation. When there is a breakdown in the nonverbal regulation of conversation, we may say something to the effect, “I really need to get going now.” In fact, we’ve seen one example where someone does not seem to pick up on the nonverbal cues about ending a phone conversation. Because of this inability to pick up on the nonverbal regulation cues, others have literally had to resort to saying, “Okay, I’m hanging up the phone right now” followed by actually hanging up the phone. In these instances, there was a breakdown in the use of nonverbal communication to regulate conversation.

Contradict

We use nonverbal communication to contradict verbal communication. Imagine that you visit your boss’s office and she asks you how you’re enjoying a new work assignment. You may feel obligated to respond positively because it is your boss asking the question, even though you may not truly feel this way. However, your nonverbal communication may contradict your verbal message, indicating to your boss that you really do not enjoy the new work assignment. In this example, your nonverbal communication contradicts your verbal message and sends a mixed message to your boss. Research suggests that when verbal and nonverbal messages contradict one another, receivers often place greater value on the nonverbal communication as the more accurate message (Argyle, Alkema & Gilmour). One place this occurs frequently is in greeting sequences. You might say to your friend in passing, “How are you?” She might say, “Fine” but have a sad tone to her voice. In this case, her nonverbal behaviors go against her verbal response. We are more likely to interpret the nonverbal communication in this situation than the verbal response.

Social Uses

Mislead

We use nonverbal communication to mislead others. We can also use nonverbal communication to deceive, and often, focus on a person’s nonverbal communication when trying to detect deception. Recall a time when someone asked your opinion of a new haircut. If you did not like it, you may have stated verbally that you liked the haircut and provided nonverbal communication to further mislead the person about how you really felt. Conversely, when we try to determine if someone is misleading us, we generally focus on the nonverbal communication of the other person. One study suggests that when we only use nonverbal communication to detect deception in others, 78% of lies and truths can be detected (Vrij, Edward, Roberts, & Bull). However, other studies indicate that we are really not very effective at determining deceit in other people (Levine, Feeley & McCornack), and that we are only accurate 45 to 70 percent of the time when trying to determine if someone is misleading us (Kalbfleisch; Burgoon, et al.; Horchak, Giger, Pochwatko). When trying to detect deception, it is more effective to examine both verbal and nonverbal communication to see if they are consistent (Vrij, Akehurst, Soukara, & Bull).

Relational Standing

We use nonverbal communication to indicate relational standing (Mehrabian; Burgoon, Buller, Hale, & deTurck; Le Poire, Duggan, Shepard, & Burgoon; Sallinen-Kuparinen; Floyd & Erbert). Take a few moments today to observe the nonverbal communication of people you see in public areas. What can you determine about their relational standing from their nonverbal communication? For example, romantic partners tend to stand close to one another and touch one another frequently. On the other hand, acquaintances generally maintain greater distances and touch less than romantic partners. Those who hold higher social status often use more space when they interact with others. In the United States, it is generally acceptable for women in platonic relationships to embrace and be physically close while males are often discouraged from doing so. Contrast this to many other nations where it is custom for males to greet each other with a kiss or a hug and hold hands as a symbol of friendship. We make many inferences about relational standing based on the nonverbal communication of those with whom we interact and observe.

Cultural Norms

We use nonverbal communication to demonstrate and maintain cultural norms. We’ve already shown that some nonverbal

communication is universal, but the majority of nonverbal communication is culturally specific. For example, in United States culture, people typically place high value on their personal space. In the United States people maintain far greater personal space than those in many other cultures. If you go to New York City, you might observe that any time someone accidentally touches you on the subway he/she might apologize profusely for the violation of personal space. Contrast this example to norms in many Asian cultures where frequent touch in crowded public spaces goes unnoticed because space is not used in the same ways.

If you go grocery shopping in China as a westerner, you might be shocked that shoppers would ram their shopping carts into others' carts when they wanted to move around them in the aisle. This is not an indication of rudeness, but a cultural difference in the negotiation of space. You would need to adapt to using this new approach to personal space, even though it carries a much different meaning in the U.S. Nonverbal cues such as touch, eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures are culturally specific and reflect and maintain the values and norms of the cultures in which they are used.



Figure 4.3.1: smiling vs. frowning woman. (CC BY-SA; Spaynton via Wikipedia)

Emotions

We use nonverbal communication to communicate emotions. While we can certainly tell people how we feel, we more frequently use nonverbal communication to express our emotions. Conversely, we tend to interpret emotions by examining nonverbal communication. For example, a friend may be feeling sad one day and it is probably easy to tell this by her nonverbal communication. Not only may she be less talkative but her shoulders may be slumped and she may not smile. One study suggests that it is important to use and interpret nonverbal communication for emotional expression, and ultimately relational attachment and satisfaction (Schachner, Shaver, & Mikulincer). Research also underscores the fact that people in close relationships have an easier time reading the nonverbal communication of emotion of their relational partners than those who aren't close. Likewise, those in close relationships can more often detect concealed emotions (Sternglanz & Depaulo).

Nonverbal communication isn't background noise; it's the system steering our conversations. When you can spot which function a cue is serving and how culture and context shape its meaning, you'll navigate mixed messages, guide turn-taking, support your words, and recognize when emotions or status are speaking for themselves.

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4.4: Nonverbal Communication Competence

As we age, we internalize social and cultural norms related to sending (encoding) and interpreting (decoding) nonverbal communication. In terms of sending, the tendency 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; improving your nonverbal communication takes commitment and continued effort. Research shows that education and training in nonverbal communication can lead to quick gains in knowledge and skill (Riggio, 1992). 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

As is stressed in our chapter on perception, 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.



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. Wikimedia Commons – CC BY 2.0.

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 are incongruent with other messages or may be perceived as such. 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.

Affects Our Interactions

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

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

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

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

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.

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 the chapter titled "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.

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 our first chapter, 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, socially attractive, 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).

Nonverbal skill is learned. As you become more aware of multichannel cues and make them congruent, you can steer emotions, build rapport through mirroring, regulate turn-taking, "listen with your eyes," and shape strong first impressions ethically. Small, deliberate adjustments to face, voice, posture, space, and timing compound quickly. Keep practicing, watch how people respond, and let that feedback refine your encoding and decoding. The payoff is clearer, warmer, and more effective interactions in every context.

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4.5: Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 Review

Big picture

- Nonverbal communication = meaning sent without words (faces, eyes, posture, touch, voice, clothing, space, time, environment).
- You cannot not communicate: even silence, absence, or posture sends messages.
- When words and nonverbals clash, people usually believe the nonverbal.

How nonverbal works

- Encoding/decoding: We “encode” messages with our bodies/voice; others “decode” them.
- Emblems: Gestures with clear, learned meanings (thumbs up, OK sign, uniforms, certain tattoos).
- Intentional vs unintentional: “Cues given” (on purpose) vs “cues given off” (leakage, habits/adaptors).
- Metacommunication: Messages about messages (e.g., “Nice to see you” + eye roll = sarcasm).

Verbal vs nonverbal: key differences

- More ambiguous: meaning depends heavily on context and clusters of cues.
- Continuous/inevitable: we’re always sending signals.
- Multi-channeled: sight, sound, touch, smell, time, space.
- More emotionally revealing and often more believable.
- More culturally specific: the “same” cue can mean different things across cultures.

Common myth check

- The “93% of communication is nonverbal” claim came from narrow lab studies of single words. Real conversations are richer; takeaway: nonverbal matters a lot, but not as a fixed percent.

Major channels (know these)

- Kinesics (body): facial expressions (six likely universals: anger, fear, disgust, sadness, happiness, surprise), eye contact, gestures, posture, body artifacts (clothing, hair, scent, tattoos, jewelry).
- Paralanguage (voice): pitch, rate, volume, quality, articulation, enunciation, pronunciation; watch disfluencies (“uh, um, like”)—minimize, don’t obsess.
- Space:
  - Territoriality: ownership/markers (central, boundary, ear markers); size, location, control of access, and artifacts send power/status cues.
  - Proxemics (distance zones, U.S.): intimate (touch–18"), personal (18"–4'), social (4'–12'), public (12’+). Cultures vary widely.
- Chronemics (time): monochronic (schedule/one-thing-at-a-time) vs polychronic (fluid/multiple). Differences show up in punctuality, duration, activity level.
- Haptics (touch): powerful; rule-bound by relationship, context, and culture. Violations dominate attention.

Functions of nonverbal (what it does with/without words)

- Duplicate: “yes” + head nod.
- Replace: just the nod (no words).

- Complement: smile + hug with “Congrats!”
- Accent: vocal stress/gesture to emphasize a word.
- Regulate: eye contact, posture, pauses to start/hold/end turns.
- Contradict: “I’m fine” with a flat tone or slumped posture.

Culture and context

- Cues are learned and culture-bound (e.g., OK sign means different things globally; norms for smiles, space, same-gender touch vary).
- Adjust expectations for space/time/touch when interacting across cultures.

Nonverbal competence (practical tips)

- Aim for congruence: align face, posture, hands, and tone with your words.
- Think in clusters: don’t read single cues in isolation.
- Manage first impressions: attentive posture, steady eye contact, appropriate artifacts (clothing/scent), and clear enunciation.
- Monitor leaks: reduce nervous adaptors (leg bounce, filler words) in high-stakes moments.
- Use regulation skills: lean in, brief hand cue to take a turn; glance to watch/door to close a convo.
- Listen actively: smile, lean in, eye contact.

Quick self-check

- Can you define each channel and give one example?
- If someone’s words say “OK” but their tone/frown says “not OK,” which do you trust and why?
- How would you adapt space/touch when moving from U.S. to a more contact-oriented culture?

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5: LISTENING

5.1: The Importance of Listening
5.2: Listening Process
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5.1: The Importance of Listening

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- identify the stages of the listening process (receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, responding).
- distinguish among the four main types of listening (discriminative, informational, critical, empathetic).
- demonstrate active listening by using back-channel cues and paraphrasing to confirm understanding in conversations.
- analyze messages using critical listening to separate facts from opinions and spot common biases or weak evidence.
- recognize common barriers to effective listening (e.g., noise, multitasking, personal bias) and apply strategies like note-taking and mental bracketing to reduce them.

In our sender-oriented society, listening is often overlooked as an important part of the communication process. Yet research shows that adults spend about 45% of their time listening, which is more than any other communicative activity. In some contexts, we spend even more time listening than that. On average, workers spend 55% of their workday listening, and managers spend about 63% of their day listening, according to Owen Hargie in his book *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice*.

Listening is a primary means through which we learn new information, which can help us meet instrumental needs as we learn things that help us complete certain tasks at work or school and get things done in general. The act of listening to our relational partners provides support, which is an important part of relational maintenance and helps us meet our relational needs. Listening to what others say about us helps us develop an accurate self-concept, which can help us more strategically communicate for identity needs in order to project to others our desired self. Overall, improving our listening skills can help us be better students, better relational partners, and more successful professionals. Stronger listening skills can make a person wiser about the world that surrounds them.

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).



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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.

In short, listening isn't a passive pause between speaking turns—it's the active engine that moves learning, work, and relationships forward. When we listen well, we absorb ideas we can act on, offer the kind of support that strengthens our connections, and refine our sense of self through honest feedback. Employers reward it, classmates rely on it, and our closest partners feel it. As you continue through this chapter, treat listening as a skill you can train: notice the cues you receive, test your understanding with paraphrases and questions, and watch how small changes—less multitasking, more presence—pay off in clearer thinking and stronger trust. If speaking is how we're seen, listening is how we truly understand; mastering both is what makes communication work.

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5.2: Listening Process

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. Listening is a process and, as such, doesn't have a defined start and finish. Like the communication process, listening has cognitive, behavioral, and relational elements and doesn't unfold in a linear, step-by-step fashion. Models of processes are informative in that they help us visualize specific components, but keep in mind that they do not capture the speed, overlapping nature, or overall complexity of the actual process in action. The stages of the listening process are receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding.

Receiving

Before we can engage other steps in the listening process, we must take in stimuli through our senses. In any given communication encounter, it is likely that we will return to the receiving stage many times as we process incoming feedback and new messages. This part of the listening process is more physiological than other parts, which include cognitive and relational elements. We primarily take in information needed for listening through auditory and visual channels. Although we don't often think about visual cues as a part of listening, they influence how we interpret messages. For example, seeing a person's face when we hear their voice allows us to take in nonverbal cues from facial expressions and eye contact. The fact that these visual cues are missing in email, text, and phone interactions presents some difficulties for reading contextual clues into meaning received through only auditory channels.



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Our chapter on perception discusses some of the ways in which incoming stimuli are filtered. These perceptual filters also play a role in listening. Some stimuli never make it in, some are filtered into subconsciousness, and others are filtered into various levels of consciousness based on their salience. Recall that salience is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context and that we tend to find things salient when those things are visually or audibly stimulating and when they meet our needs or interests. Think about how it's much easier to listen to a lecture on a subject that you find very interesting.

It is important to consider noise as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with hearing, which is the physical process of receiving stimuli through internal and external components of the ears and eyes, and some 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 noise.

Interpreting

During the interpreting stage of listening, we combine the visual and auditory information we receive and try to make meaning out of that information using schemata. The interpreting stage engages cognitive and relational processing as we take in informational, contextual, and relational cues and try to connect them in meaningful ways to previous experiences. It is through the interpreting stage that we may begin to understand the stimuli we have received. When we understand something, we are able to attach meaning by connecting information to previous experiences. Through the process of comparing new information with old information, we may also update or revise particular schemata if we find the new information relevant and credible. If we have difficulty interpreting information, meaning we don't have previous experience or information in our existing schemata to make sense of it, then it is difficult to transfer the information into our long-term memory for later recall. In situations where understanding the information we receive isn't important or isn't a goal, this stage may be fairly short or even skipped. After all, we can move something to our long-term memory by repetition and then later recall it without ever having understood it. My friend remembers earning perfect scores on exams in an anatomy class in college because he was able to memorize and recall, for example, all the organs in the digestive system. In fact, he might still be able to do that now over a decade later. But neither then nor now, he says, could he describe the significance or function of most of those organs—meaning, he didn't really get to a level of understanding but simply stored the information for later recall.

Recalling

Our ability to recall information is dependent on some of the physiological limits of how memory works. Overall, our memories are known to be fallible. We forget about half of what we hear immediately after hearing it, recall 35% 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. Many quizzes and tests in school are based on recall and are often used to assess how well students comprehend information presented in class, which is seen as an indication of how well they listened. When recall is our only goal, we excel at it. Experiments have found that people can memorize and later recall a set of faces and names with near 100% recall when sitting in a quiet lab and asked to do so. But throw in external noise, more visual stimuli, and multiple contextual influences, and we can't remember the name of the person we were just introduced to one minute earlier. Even in interpersonal encounters, we rely on recall to test whether or not someone was listening. Imagine that Azam is talking to his friend Belle, who is sitting across from him in a restaurant booth. Azam, annoyed that Belle keeps checking her phone, stops and asks, "Are you listening?" Belle inevitably replies, "Yes," since we rarely fess up to our poor listening habits, and Azam replies, "Well, what did I just say?"

Evaluating

When we evaluate something, we make judgments about its credibility, completeness, and worth. In terms of credibility, we try to determine the degree to which we believe a speaker's statements are 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.



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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.

Listening begins long before we speak and unfolds as a dynamic, non-linear process with five interrelated stages: receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding. We first take in auditory and visual cues while managing noise that can disrupt hearing and thinking. We then make meaning by linking new input to prior knowledge (schemata), which supports later memory—though recall is naturally limited by how memory systems work. Next, we critically assess messages for credibility, completeness, and value while guarding against prejudging speakers. Finally, we show understanding through feedback—using back-channel cues, paraphrasing, and clarifying questions—to keep conversations accurate and responsive.

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5.3: Listening Types and Habits

Whether you're decoding a faint sound on a dark street, taking notes in class, weighing a persuasive claim, or comforting a friend, you're practicing different kinds of listening. This section introduces four types—discriminative (noticing specific cues), informational (comprehending and retaining), critical (analyzing credibility and logic), and empathetic (understanding feelings and perspectives). You'll also meet four listening styles—people-, action-, content-, and time-oriented—and learn when each helps or hinders.

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.

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 *listen to scan and monitor our surroundings 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 5.3.1: Copy and Paste Caption here. (Photo by The Climate Reality Project on Unsplash)

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 the persuasive media messages we encounter daily. 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 percent of people have more than one preferred listening style, and that they choose a style based on the listening situation (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). Other research finds that people often still revert 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, 2003). Following a brief overview of each listening style, we will explore some of their applications, strengths, and weaknesses.

- **People-oriented listeners** are concerned about the needs and feelings of others and may get distracted from a specific task or the content of a message in order to address feelings.
- **Action-oriented listeners** prefer well-organized, precise, and accurate information. They can become frustrated with 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 short cuts or cutting corners) when they think they have enough information.

People-Oriented Listeners

People-oriented listeners are concerned about the emotional states of others and listen with the purpose of offering support in interpersonal relationships. People-oriented listeners can be characterized as "supporters" who are caring and understanding. These listeners are sought out because they are known as people who will "lend an ear." They may or may not be valued for the advice they give, but all people often want is a good listener. This type of listening may be especially valuable in interpersonal communication involving emotional exchanges, as a person-oriented listener can create a space where people can make themselves vulnerable without fear of being cut off or judged. People-oriented listeners are likely skilled empathetic listeners and may find success in supportive fields like counseling, social work, or nursing.

Action-Oriented Listeners

Action-oriented listeners focus on what action needs to take place in regards to a received message and try to formulate an organized way to initiate that action. These listeners are frustrated by disorganization, because it detracts from the possibility of actually doing something. Action-oriented listeners can be thought of as "builders"—like an engineer, a construction site foreperson, or a skilled project manager. This style of listening can be very effective when a task needs to be completed under time, budgetary, or other logistical constraints. One research study found that people prefer an action-oriented style of listening in instructional contexts (Imhof, 2004). In other situations, such as interpersonal communication, action-oriented listeners may not actually be very interested in listening, instead taking a "What do you want me to do?" approach. A friend and colleague of mine who exhibits some qualities of an action-oriented listener once told me about an encounter she had with a close friend who had a stillborn baby. My friend said she immediately went into "action mode." Although it was difficult for her to connect with her friend at an emotional/empathetic level, she was able to use her action-oriented approach to help out in other ways as she helped make funeral arrangements, coordinated with other family and friends, and handled the details that accompanied this tragic emotional experience. As you can see from this example, the action-oriented listening style often contrasts with the people-oriented listening style.

Content-Oriented Listeners

Content-oriented listeners like to listen to complex information and evaluate the content of a message, often from multiple perspectives, before drawing conclusions. These listeners can be thought of as "learners," and they also ask questions to solicit more information to fill out their understanding of an issue. Content-oriented listeners often enjoy high perceived credibility because of their thorough, balanced, and objective approach to engaging with information. Content-oriented listeners are likely skilled informational and critical listeners and may find success in academic careers in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences. Ideally, judges and politicians would also possess these characteristics.

Time-Oriented Listeners

Time-oriented listeners are more concerned about time limits and timelines than they are with the content or senders of a message. These listeners can be thought of as “executives,” and they tend to actually verbalize the time constraints under which they are operating.



JD Lasica – Business call – CC BY-NC 2.0.

For example, a time-oriented supervisor may say the following to an employee who has just entered his office and asked to talk: “Sure, I can talk, but I only have about five minutes.” These listeners may also exhibit nonverbal cues that indicate time and/or attention shortages, such as looking at a clock, avoiding eye contact, or nonverbally trying to close down an interaction. Time-oriented listeners are also more likely to interrupt others, which may make them seem insensitive to emotional/personal needs. People often get action-oriented and time-oriented listeners confused. Action-oriented listeners would be happy to get to a conclusion or decision quickly if they perceive that they are acting on well-organized and accurate information. They would, however, not mind taking longer to reach a conclusion when dealing with a complex topic, and they would delay making a decision if the information presented to them didn’t meet their standards of organization. Unlike time-oriented listeners, action-oriented listeners are not as likely to cut people off (especially if people are presenting relevant information) and are not as likely to take short cuts.

In sum, there’s no one “right” way to listen—effective communicators match their approach to the moment. We tune in discriminatively to notice key cues, shift to informational listening to learn, engage critical listening to test claims and evidence, and lean into empathetic listening to connect and support. Our personal styles—people-, action-, content-, or time-oriented—can help or hinder depending on the context, so the real skill is flexing: recognizing what the situation calls for and adjusting our habits accordingly. When we choose the right type and temper our style, we make conversations clearer, relationships stronger, and decisions smarter.

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5.4: Barriers to Effective Listening

Barriers to effective listening are present at every stage of the listening process (Hargie, 2011). At the receiving stage, noise can block or distort incoming stimuli. At the interpreting stage, complex or abstract information may be difficult to relate to previous experiences, making it difficult to reach understanding. At the recalling stage, natural limits to our memory and challenges to concentration can interfere with remembering. At the evaluating stage, personal biases and prejudices can lead us to block people out or assume we know what they are going to say. At the responding stage, a lack of paraphrasing and questioning skills can lead to misunderstanding. In the following section, we will explore how environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and bad listening practices present barriers to effective listening.

Environmental and Physical Barriers to Listening

Environmental factors such as lighting, temperature, and furniture affect our ability to listen. A room that is too dark can make us sleepy, just as a room that is too warm or cool can raise awareness of our physical discomfort to a point that it is distracting. Some seating arrangements facilitate listening, while others separate people. In general, listening is easier when listeners can make direct eye contact with and are in close physical proximity to a speaker. That said, eye contact and physical proximity can still be affected by noise. As we learned in the first chapter, environmental noises such as a whirring air conditioner, barking dogs, or a ringing fire alarm can obviously interfere with listening despite direct lines of sight and well-placed furniture.

Physiological noise, like environmental noise, can interfere with our ability to process incoming information. This is considered a physical barrier to effective listening because it emanates from our physical body. Physiological noise is noise stemming from a physical illness, injury, or bodily stress. Ailments such as a cold, a broken leg, a headache, or a poison ivy outbreak can range from annoying to unbearably painful and impact our listening relative to their intensity.

Another type of noise, **psychological noise**, bridges physical and cognitive barriers to effective listening. Psychological noise, or noise stemming from our psychological states including moods and level of arousal, can facilitate or impede listening. Any mood or state of arousal, positive or negative, that is too far above or below our regular baseline creates a barrier to message reception and processing. The generally positive emotional state of being in love can be just as much of a barrier as feeling hatred. Excited arousal can also distract as much as anxious arousal. Stress about an upcoming events ranging from losing a job, to having surgery, to wondering about what to eat for lunch can overshadow incoming messages. While we will explore cognitive barriers to effective listening more in the next section, psychological noise is relevant here given that the body and mind are not completely separate. In fact, they can interact in ways that further interfere with listening. Fatigue, for example, is usually a combination of psychological and physiological stresses that manifests as stress (psychological noise) and weakness, sleepiness, and tiredness (physiological noise). Additionally, mental anxiety (psychological noise) can also manifest itself in our bodies through trembling, sweating, blushing, or even breaking out in rashes (physiological noise).

Cognitive and Personal Barriers to Listening

Aside from the barriers to effective listening that may be present in the environment or emanate from our bodies, cognitive limits, a lack of listening preparation, difficult or disorganized messages, and prejudices can interfere with listening. Whether you call it multitasking, daydreaming, glazing over, or drifting off, we all cognitively process other things while receiving messages. If you think of your listening mind as a wall of ten televisions, you may notice that in some situations five of the ten televisions are tuned into one channel. If that one channel is a lecture being given by your professor, then you are exerting about half of your cognitive processing abilities on one message. In another situation, all ten televisions may be on different channels. The fact that we have the capability to process more than one thing at a time offers some advantages and disadvantages. But unless we can better understand how our cognitive capacities and personal preferences affect our listening, we are likely to experience more barriers than benefits.

Difference between Speech and Thought Rate

Our ability to process more information than what comes from one speaker or source creates a barrier to effective listening. While people speak at a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute, we can process between 400 and 800 words per minute (Hargie, 2011). This gap between speech rate and thought rate gives us an opportunity to side-process any number of thoughts that can be

distracting from a more important message. Because of this gap, it is impossible to give one message our "undivided attention," but we can occupy other channels in our minds with thoughts related to the central message. For example, using some of your extra cognitive processing abilities to repeat, rephrase, or reorganize messages coming from one source allows you to use that extra capacity in a way that reinforces the primary message.

The difference between speech and thought rate connects to personal barriers to listening, as personal concerns are often the focus of competing thoughts that can take us away from listening and challenge our ability to concentrate on others' messages. Two common barriers to concentration are self-centeredness and lack of motivation (Brownell, 1993). For example, when our self-consciousness is raised, we may be too busy thinking about how we look, how we're sitting, or what others think of us to be attentive to an incoming message. Additionally, we are often challenged when presented with messages that we do not find personally relevant. In general, we employ selective attention, which refers to our tendency to pay attention to the messages that benefit us in some way and filter others out. So the student who is checking his or her Twitter feed during class may suddenly switch his or her attention back to the previously ignored professor when the following words are spoken: "This will be important for the exam."



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Another common barrier to effective listening that stems from the speech and thought rate divide is response preparation. Response preparation refers to our tendency to rehearse what we are going to say next while a speaker is still talking. Rehearsal of what we will say once a speaker's turn is over is an important part of the listening process that takes place between the recalling and evaluation and/or the evaluation and responding stage. Rehearsal becomes problematic when response preparation begins as someone is receiving a message and hasn't had time to engage in interpretation or recall. In this sense, we are listening with the goal of responding instead of with the goal of understanding, which can lead us to miss important information that could influence our response.

Lack of Listening Preparation

Another barrier to effective listening is a general lack of listening preparation. Unfortunately, most people have never received any formal training or instruction related to listening. Although some people think listening skills just develop over time, competent listening is difficult, and enhancing listening skills takes concerted effort. Even when listening education is available, people do not embrace it as readily as they do opportunities to enhance their speaking skills. Listening is often viewed as an annoyance or a chore, or just ignored or minimized as part of the communication process. In addition, our individualistic society values speaking more than listening, as it's the speakers who are sometimes literally in the spotlight. Although listening competence is a crucial part of social interaction and many of us value others we perceive to be "good listeners," listening just doesn't get the same kind of praise, attention, instruction, or credibility as speaking. Teachers, parents, and relational partners explicitly convey the importance of listening through statements like "You better listen to me," "Listen closely," and "Listen up," but these demands are rarely paired with concrete instruction. So unless you plan on taking more communication courses in the future (and I hope you do), this chapter may be the only instruction you receive on the basics of the listening process, some barriers to effective listening, and how we can increase our listening competence.

Bad Messages and/or Speakers

Bad messages and/or speakers also present a barrier to effective listening. Sometimes our trouble listening originates in the sender. In terms of message construction, poorly structured messages or messages that are too vague, too jargon filled, or too simple can present listening difficulties. In terms of speakers' delivery, verbal fillers, monotone voices, distracting movements, or a disheveled appearance can inhibit our ability to cognitively process a message (Hargie, 2011). As we will learn in "Bad Listening Practices" below, speakers can employ particular strategies to create listenable messages that take some of the burden off the listener by tailoring a message to be heard and processed easily. The chapter titled "Preparing a Speech" also discusses many strategies for creating messages tailored for oral delivery, including things like preview and review statements, transitions, and parallel wording. Listening also becomes difficult when a speaker tries to present too much information. Information overload is a common barrier to effective listening that good speakers can help mitigate by building redundancy into their speeches and providing concrete examples of new information to help audience members interpret and understand the key ideas.

Prejudice

Oscar Wilde said, "Listening is a very dangerous thing. If one listens one may be convinced." Unfortunately, some of our default ways of processing information and perceiving others lead us to rigid ways of thinking. When we engage in prejudiced listening, we are usually trying to preserve our ways of thinking and avoid being convinced of something different. This type of prejudice is a barrier to effective listening, because when we prejudge a person based on his or her identity or ideas, we usually stop listening in an active and/or ethical way.



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We exhibit prejudice in our listening in several ways, some of which are more obvious than others. For example, we may claim to be in a hurry and only selectively address the parts of a message that we agree with or that aren't controversial. We can also operate from a state of denial where we avoid a subject or person altogether so that our views are not challenged. Prejudices that are based on a person's identity, such as race, age, occupation, or appearance, may lead us to assume that we know what he or she will say, essentially closing down the listening process. Keeping an open mind and engaging in perception checking can help us identify prejudiced listening and hopefully shift into more competent listening practices.

Bad Listening Practices

The previously discussed barriers to effective listening may be difficult to overcome because they are at least partially beyond our control. Physical barriers, cognitive limitations, and perceptual biases exist within all of us, and it is more realistic to believe that we can become more conscious of and lessen them than it is to believe that we can eliminate them altogether. Other "bad listening" practices may be habitual, but they are easier to address with some concerted effort. These bad listening practices include interrupting, distorted listening, eavesdropping, aggressive listening, narcissistic listening, and pseudo-listening.

Interrupting

Conversations unfold as a series of turns, and turn taking is negotiated through a complex set of verbal and nonverbal signals that are consciously and subconsciously received. In this sense, conversational turn taking has been likened to a dance where communicators try to avoid stepping on each other's toes. One of the most frequent glitches in the turn-taking process is interruption, but not all interruptions are considered "bad listening." An interruption could be unintentional if we misread cues and think a person is done speaking only to have him or her start up again at the same time we do. Sometimes interruptions are more like overlapping statements that show support (e.g., "I think so too.") or excitement about the conversation (e.g., "That's so cool!"). Back-channel cues like "uh-huh," as we learned earlier, also overlap with a speaker's message. We may also interrupt out of necessity if we're engaged in a task with the other person and need to offer directions (e.g., "Turn left here."), instructions (e.g., "Will you whisk the eggs?"), or warnings (e.g., "Look out behind you!"). All these interruptions are not typically thought of as evidence of bad listening unless they become distracting for the speaker or are unnecessary.

Unintentional interruptions can still be considered bad listening if they result from mindless communication. As we've already learned, intended meaning is not as important as the meaning that is generated in the interaction itself. So if you interrupt unintentionally, but because you were only half-listening, then the interruption is still evidence of bad listening. The speaker may form a negative impression of you that can't just be erased by you noting that you didn't "mean to interrupt." Interruptions can also be used as an attempt to dominate a conversation. A person engaging in this type of interruption may lead the other communicator to try to assert dominance, too, resulting in a competition to see who can hold the floor the longest or the most often. More than likely, though, the speaker will form a negative impression of the interrupter and may withdraw from the conversation.

Distorted Listening

Distorted listening occurs in many ways. Sometimes we just get the order of information wrong, which can have relatively little negative effects if we are casually recounting a story, annoying effects if we forget the order of turns (left, right, left or right, left, right?) in our driving directions, or very negative effects if we recount the events of a crime out of order, which leads to faulty testimony at a criminal trial. Rationalization is another form of distorted listening through which we adapt, edit, or skew incoming information to fit our existing schemata. We may, for example, reattribute the cause of something to better suit our own beliefs. If a professor is explaining to a student why he earned a "D" on his final paper, the student could reattribute the cause from "I didn't follow the paper guidelines" to "this professor is an unfair grader." Sometimes we actually change the words we hear to make them better fit what we are thinking. This can easily happen if we join a conversation late, overhear part of a conversation, or are being a lazy listener and miss important setup and context.

Passing along distorted information can lead to negative consequences ranging from starting a false rumor about someone to passing along incorrect medical instructions from one health-care provider to the next (Hargie, 2011). Last, the addition of material to a message is a type of distorted listening that actually goes against our normal pattern of listening, which involves reducing the amount of information and losing some meaning as we take it in. The metaphor of "weaving a tall tale" is related to the practice of distorting through addition, as inaccurate or fabricated information is added to what was actually heard. Addition of material is also a common feature of gossip. An excellent example of the result of distorted listening is provided by the character Anthony Crispino on *Saturday Night Live,* who passes along distorted news on the "Weekend Update" segment. In past episodes, he has noted that Lebron James turned down the *Cleveland Show* to be on *Miami Vice* (instead of left the Cleveland Cavaliers to play basketball for the Miami Heat) and that President Obama planned on repealing the "Bush haircuts" (instead of the Bush tax cuts).

Eavesdropping

Eavesdropping is a bad listening practice that involves a calculated and planned attempt to secretly listen to a conversation.

There is a difference between eavesdropping on and overhearing a conversation. Many if not most of the interactions we have throughout the day occur in the presence of other people. However, given that our perceptual fields are usually focused on the interaction, we are often unaware of the other people around us or don't think about the fact that they could be listening in on our conversation. We usually only become aware of the fact that other people could be listening in when we're discussing something private.



Alan Strakey – Eavesdropping – CC BY-ND 2.0.

People eavesdrop for a variety of reasons. People might think another person is talking about them behind their back or that someone is engaged in illegal or unethical behavior. Sometimes people eavesdrop to feed the gossip mill or out of curiosity (McCornack, 2007). In any case, this type of listening is considered bad because it is a violation of people's privacy. Consequences for eavesdropping may include an angry reaction if caught, damage to interpersonal relationships, or being perceived as dishonest and sneaky. Additionally, eavesdropping may lead people to find out information that is personally upsetting or hurtful, especially if the point of the eavesdropping is to find out what people are saying behind their back.

Aggressive Listening

Aggressive listening is a bad listening practice in which people pay attention in order to attack something that a speaker says (McCornack, 2007). Aggressive listeners like to ambush speakers in order to critique their ideas, personality, or other characteristics. Such behavior often results from built-up frustration within an interpersonal relationship. Unfortunately, the more two people know each other, the better they will be at aggressive listening. Take the following exchange between long-term partners:

Deb:
I've been thinking about making a salsa garden next to the side porch. I think it would be really good to be able to go pick our own tomatoes and peppers and cilantro to make homemade salsa.

Summer:
Really? When are you thinking about doing it?

Deb:
Next weekend. Would you like to help?

Summer:
I won't hold my breath. Every time you come up with some "idea of the week" you get so excited about it. But do you ever follow through with it? No. We'll be eating salsa from the store next year, just like we are now.

Although Summer's initial response to Deb's idea is seemingly appropriate and positive, she asks the question because she has already planned her upcoming aggressive response. Summer's aggression toward Deb isn't about a salsa garden; it's about a

building frustration with what Summer perceives as Deb's lack of follow-through on her ideas. Aside from engaging in aggressive listening because of built-up frustration, such listeners may also attack others' ideas or mock their feelings because of their own low self-esteem and insecurities.

Narcissistic Listening

Narcissistic listening is a form of self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them (McCornack, 2007). Narcissistic listeners redirect the focus of the conversation to them by interrupting or changing the topic. When the focus is taken off them, narcissistic listeners may give negative feedback by pouting, providing negative criticism of the speaker or topic, or ignoring the speaker. A common sign of narcissistic listening is the combination of a "pivot," when listeners shift the focus of attention back to them, and "one-upping," when listeners try to top what previous speakers have said during the interaction. You can see this narcissistic combination in the following interaction:

Bryce:
My boss has been really unfair to me lately and hasn't been letting me work around my class schedule. I think I may have to quit, but I don't know where I'll find another job.

Toby:
Why are you complaining? I've been working with the same stupid boss for two years. He doesn't even care that I'm trying to get my degree and work at the same time. And you should hear the way he talks to me in front of the other employees.

Narcissistic listeners, given their self-centeredness, may actually fool themselves into thinking that they are listening and actively contributing to a conversation. We all have the urge to share our own stories during interactions, because other people's communication triggers our own memories about related experiences. It is generally more competent to withhold sharing our stories until the other person has been able to speak and we have given the appropriate support and response. But we all shift the focus of a conversation back to us occasionally, either because we don't know another way to respond or because we are making an attempt at empathy. Narcissistic listeners, on the other hand, consistently interrupt or follow another speaker with statements like "That reminds me of the time...," "Well, if I were you...," and "That's nothing..." (Nichols, 1995) As we'll learn later, matching stories isn't considered empathetic listening, but occasionally doing it doesn't make you a narcissistic listener.

Pseudo-listening

Do you have a friend or family member who repeats stories? If so, then you've probably engaged in pseudo-listening as a politeness strategy. Pseudo-listening is behaving as if you're paying attention to a speaker when you're actually not (McCornack, 2007). Outwardly visible signals of attentiveness are an important part of the listening process, but when they are just an "act," the pseudo-listener is engaging in bad listening behaviors. She or he is not actually going through the stages of the listening process and will likely not be able to recall the speaker's message or offer a competent and relevant response. Although it is a bad listening practice, we all understandably engage in pseudo-listening from time to time. We may pseudo-listen to a romantic partner or grandfather's story for the fifteenth time to prevent hurting their feelings. We should avoid pseudo-listening when possible and should definitely avoid making it a listening habit. Although we may get away with it in some situations, each time we risk being "found out," which could have negative relational consequences.

Ultimately, the obstacles to effective listening aren't isolated glitches—they can surface at every stage, from the moment we receive a message to the way we respond. The good news is that once we can name these barriers—environmental distractions, physiological and psychological noise, cognitive overload, bias, and counterproductive habits—we can manage many of them. In addition, watch for faulty listening behaviors such as interrupting, distorted listening, eavesdropping, aggressive or narcissistic listening, and pseudo-listening. We'll explore ways to improve listening competence in the following section.

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5.5: Improving Listening Competence

Many people admit that they could stand to improve their listening skills. 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 accompany it. Looking back to the types of listening discussed earlier, we will learn specific strategies for sharpening our critical and empathetic listening skills.

Listening Competence at Each Stage of the Listening Process

We can develop competence within each stage of the listening process, as the following list indicates (Ridge, 1993):

1. To improve listening at the receiving stage,
    - prepare yourself to listen,
    - discern between intentional messages and noise,
    - concentrate on stimuli most relevant to your listening purpose(s) or goal(s),
    - be mindful of the selection and attention process as much as possible,
    - pay attention to turn-taking signals so you can follow the conversational flow, and
    - avoid interrupting someone while they are speaking in order to maintain your ability to receive stimuli and listen.
2. To improve listening at the interpreting stage,
    - identify main points and supporting points;
    - use contextual clues from the person or environment to discern additional meaning;
    - be aware of how a relational, cultural, or situational context can influence meaning;
    - be aware of the different meanings of silence; and
    - note differences in tone of voice and other paralinguistic cues that influence meaning.
3. To improve listening at the recalling stage,
    - use multiple sensory channels to decode messages and make more complete memories;
    - repeat, rephrase, and reorganize information to fit your cognitive preferences; and
    - use mnemonic devices as a gimmick to help with recall.
4. To improve listening at the evaluating stage,
    - separate facts, inferences, and judgments;
    - be familiar with and able to identify persuasive strategies and fallacies of reasoning;
    - assess the credibility of the speaker and the message; and
    - be aware of your own biases and how your perceptual filters can create barriers to effective listening.
5. To improve listening at the responding stage,
    - ask appropriate clarifying and follow-up questions and paraphrase information to check understanding,
    - give feedback that is relevant to the speaker's purpose/motivation for speaking,
    - adapt your response to the speaker and the context, and
    - do not let the preparation and rehearsal of your response diminish earlier stages of listening.

Active Listening

Active listening refers to the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices. Active listening can help address many of the environmental, physical, cognitive, and personal barriers to effective listening that we discussed earlier. The behaviors associated with active listening can also enhance informational, critical, and empathetic listening.

Active Listening Preparation

Being an active listener starts before you actually start receiving a message. Active listeners make strategic choices and take action in order to set up ideal listening conditions. Physical and environmental noises can often be managed by moving locations or by manipulating the lighting, temperature, or furniture. When possible, avoid important listening activities during times of distracting psychological or physiological noise. For example, we often know when we're going to be hungry, full, more awake, less awake, more anxious, or less anxious, and advance planning can alleviate the presence of these barriers. For college students, who

often have some flexibility in their class schedules, knowing when you best listen can help you make strategic choices regarding what class to take when. And student options are increasing, as some colleges are offering classes in the overnight hours to accommodate working students and students who are just "night owls" (Toppo, 2011). Of course, we don't always have control over our schedule, in which case we will need to utilize other effective listening strategies that we will learn more about later in this chapter.

In terms of cognitive barriers to effective listening, we can prime ourselves to listen by analyzing a listening situation before it begins. For example, you could ask yourself the following questions:

1. "What are my goals for listening to this message?"
2. "How does this message relate to me / affect my life?"
3. "What listening type and style are most appropriate for this message?"

As we learned earlier, the difference between speech and thought processing rate means listeners' level of attention varies while receiving a message. Effective listeners must work to maintain focus as much as possible and refocus when attention shifts or fades (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). One way to do this is to find the motivation to listen. If you can identify intrinsic and or extrinsic motivations for listening to a particular message, then you will be more likely to remember the information presented. Ask yourself how a message could impact your life, your career, your intellect, or your relationships. This can help overcome our tendency toward selective attention. As senders of messages, we can help listeners by making the relevance of what we're saying clear and offering well-organized messages that are tailored for our listeners. We will learn much more about establishing relevance, organizing a message, and gaining the attention of an audience in public speaking contexts later in the book.

Given that we can process more words per minute than people can speak, we can engage in internal dialogue, making good use of our intrapersonal communication, to become a better listener. Three possibilities for internal dialogue include covert coaching, self-reinforcement, and covert questioning; explanations and examples of each follow (Hargie, 2011):

- **Covert coaching** involves sending yourself messages containing advice about better listening, such as "You're getting distracted by things you have to do after work. Just focus on what your supervisor is saying now."
- **Self-reinforcement** involves sending yourself affirmative and positive messages: "You're being a good active listener. This will help you do well on the next exam."
- **Covert questioning** involves asking yourself questions about the content in ways that focus your attention and reinforce the material: "What is the main idea from that PowerPoint slide?" "Why is he talking about his brother in front of our neighbors?"

Internal dialogue is a more structured way to engage in active listening, but we can use more general approaches as well. I suggest that students occupy the "extra" channels in their mind with thoughts that are related to the primary message being received instead of thoughts that are unrelated. We can use those channels to resort, rephrase, and repeat what a speaker says. When we resort, we can help mentally repair disorganized messages. When we rephrase, we can put messages into our own words in ways that better fit our cognitive preferences. When we repeat, we can help messages transfer from short-term to long-term memory.

Other tools can help with concentration and memory. Mental bracketing refers to the process of intentionally separating out intrusive or irrelevant thoughts that may distract you from listening (McCornack, 2007). This requires that we monitor our concentration and attention and be prepared to let thoughts that aren't related to a speaker's message pass through our minds without us giving them much attention. Mnemonic devices are techniques that can aid in information recall (Hargie 2011). Starting in ancient Greece and Rome, educators used these devices to help people remember information. They work by imposing order and organization on information. Three main mnemonic devices are acronyms, rhymes, and visualization, and examples of each follow:

- **Acronyms.** HOMES—to help remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior).
- **Rhyme.** "Righty tighty, lefty loosey"—to remember which way most light bulbs, screws, and other coupling devices turn to make them go in or out.
- **Visualization.** Imagine seeing a glass of port wine (which is red) and the red navigation light on a boat to help remember that the red light on a boat is always on the port side, which will also help you remember that the green light must be on the starboard side.

Active Listening Behaviors

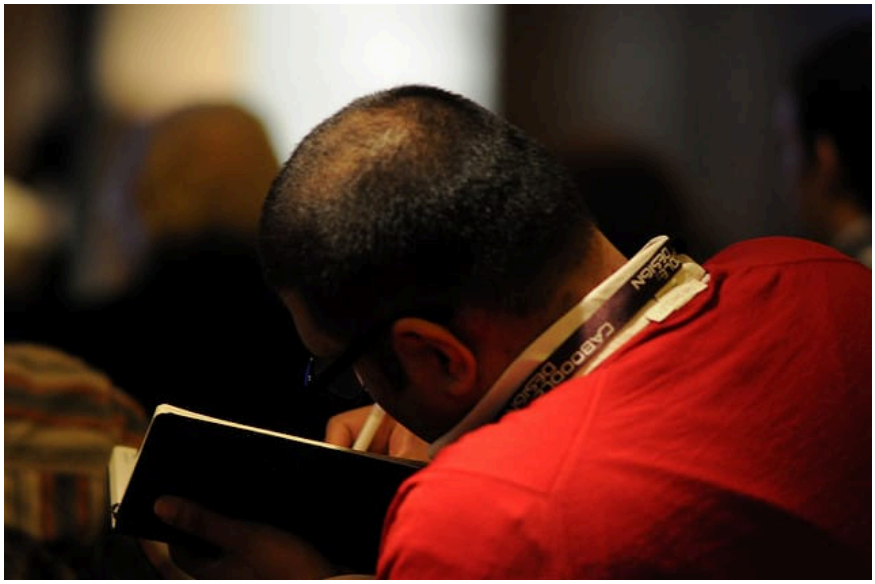
From the suggestions discussed previously, you can see that we can prepare for active listening in advance and engage in certain

cognitive strategies to help us listen better. We also engage in active listening behaviors as we receive and process messages.

Eye contact is a key sign of active listening. Speakers usually interpret a listener's eye contact as a signal of attentiveness. While a lack of eye contact may indicate inattentiveness, it can also signal cognitive processing. When we look away to process new information, we usually do it unconsciously. Be aware, however, that your conversational partner may interpret this as not listening. If you really do need to take a moment to think about something, you could indicate that to the other person by saying, "That's new information to me. Give me just a second to think through it." We already learned the role that back-channel cues play in listening. An occasional head nod and "uh-huh" signal that you are paying attention. However, when we give these cues as a form of "autopilot" listening, others can usually tell that we are pseudo-listening, and whether they call us on it or not, that impression could lead to negative judgments.

A more direct way to indicate active listening is to reference previous statements made by the speaker. Norms of politeness usually call on us to reference a past statement or connect to the speaker's current thought before starting a conversational turn. Being able to summarize what someone said to ensure that the topic has been satisfactorily covered and understood or being able to segue in such a way that validates what the previous speaker said helps regulate conversational flow. Asking probing questions is another way to directly indicate listening and to keep a conversation going, since they encourage and invite a person to speak more. You can also ask questions that seek clarification and not just elaboration. Speakers should present complex information at a slower speaking rate than familiar information, but many will not. Remember that your nonverbal feedback can be useful for a speaker, as it signals that you are listening but also whether or not you understand. If a speaker fails to read your nonverbal feedback, you may need to follow up with verbal communication in the form of paraphrased messages and clarifying questions.

As active listeners, we want to be excited and engaged, but don't let excitement manifest itself in interruptions. Being an active listener means knowing when to maintain our role as listener and resist the urge to take a conversational turn. Research shows that people with higher social status are more likely to interrupt others, so keep this in mind and be prepared for it if you are speaking to a high-status person, or try to resist it if you are the high-status person in an interaction (Hargie, 2011).



Steven Lilley – Note taking – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Note-taking can also indicate active listening. Translating information through writing into our own cognitive structures and schemata allows us to better interpret and assimilate information. Of course, note-taking isn't always a viable option. It would be fairly awkward to take notes during a first date or a casual exchange between new coworkers. But in some situations where we wouldn't normally consider taking notes, a little awkwardness might be worth it for the sake of understanding and recalling the information. For example, many people don't think about taking notes when getting information from their doctor or banker. I actually invite students to take notes during informal meetings because I think they sometimes don't think about it or don't think it's appropriate. But many people would rather someone jot down notes instead of having to respond to follow-up questions on information that was already clearly conveyed. To help facilitate your note-taking, you might say something like "Do you mind if I jot down some notes? This seems important."

Becoming a Better Critical Listener

Critical listening involves evaluating the credibility, completeness, and worth of a speaker's message. Some listening scholars note that critical listening represents the deepest level of listening (Floyd, 1985). Critical listening is also important in a democracy that values free speech. The US Constitution grants US citizens the right to free speech, and many people duly protect that right for you and me. Since people can say just about anything they want, we are surrounded by countless messages that vary tremendously in terms of their value, degree of ethics, accuracy, and quality. Therefore it falls on us to responsibly and critically evaluate the messages we receive. Some messages are produced by people who are intentionally misleading, ill informed, or motivated by the potential for personal gain, but such messages can be received as honest, credible, or altruistic even though they aren't. Being able to critically evaluate messages helps us have more control over and awareness of the influence such people may have on us. In order to critically evaluate messages, we must enhance our critical-listening skills.

Some critical-listening skills include **distinguishing between facts and inferences**, evaluating supporting evidence, discovering your own biases, and listening beyond the message. Distinguishing between facts and inferences is an ideal that is not always met in practice, so a critical listener should also make these distinctions, since the speaker may not. Since facts are widely agreed-on conclusions, they can be verified as such through some extra research. Take care in your research to note the context from which the fact emerged, as speakers may take a statistic or quote out of context, distorting its meaning. Inferences are not as easy to evaluate, because they are based on unverifiable thoughts of a speaker or on speculation. Inferences are usually based at least partially on something that is known, so it is possible to evaluate whether an inference was made carefully or not. In this sense, you may evaluate an inference based on several known facts as more credible than an inference based on one fact and more speculation. Asking a question like "What led you to think this?" is a good way to get information needed to evaluate the strength of an inference.

Distinguishing among facts and inferences and **evaluating the credibility of supporting material** are critical-listening skills that also require good informational-listening skills. In more formal speaking situations, speakers may cite published or publicly available sources to support their messages. When speakers verbally cite their sources, you can use the credibility of the source to help evaluate the credibility of the speaker's message. For example, a national newspaper would likely be more credible on a major national event than a tabloid magazine or an anonymous blog. In regular interactions, people also have sources for their information but are not as likely to note them within their message. Asking questions like "Where'd you hear that?" or "How do you know that?" can help get information needed to make critical evaluations. You can look to the chapter titled "Informative and Persuasive Speaking" to learn much more about persuasive strategies and how to evaluate the strength of arguments.

Discovering your own biases can help you recognize when they interfere with your ability to fully process a message. Unfortunately, most people aren't asked to critically reflect on their identities and their perspectives unless they are in college, and even people who were once critically reflective in college or elsewhere may no longer be so. Biases are also difficult to discover, because we don't see them as biases; we see them as normal or "the way things are." Asking yourself "What led you to think this?" and "How do you know that?" can be a good start toward acknowledging your biases.

Last, to be a better critical listener, **think beyond the message**. A good critical listener asks the following questions: What is being said and what is not being said? In whose interests are these claims being made? Whose voices/ideas are included and excluded? These questions take into account that speakers intentionally and unintentionally slant, edit, or twist messages to make them fit particular perspectives or for personal gain. Also ask yourself questions like "What are the speaker's goals?" You can also rephrase that question and direct it toward the speaker, asking them, "What is your goal in this interaction?" When you feel yourself nearing an evaluation or conclusion, pause and ask yourself what influenced you. Although we like to think that we are most often persuaded through logical evidence and reasoning, we are susceptible to persuasive shortcuts that rely on the credibility or likability of a speaker or on our emotions rather than the strength of his or her evidence (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). So keep a check on your emotional involvement to be aware of how it may be influencing your evaluation. Also, be aware that how likable, attractive, or friendly you think a person is may also lead you to more positively evaluate his or her messages.

Other Tips to Help You Become a Better Critical Listener

- Ask questions to help get more information and increase your critical awareness when you get answers like "Because that's the way things are," "It's always been like that," "I don't know; I just don't like it," "Everyone believes that," or "It's just natural/normal." These are not really answers that are useful in your critical evaluation and may be an indication that speakers don't really know why they reached the conclusion they did or that they reached it without much critical thinking on their part.
- Be especially critical of speakers who set up "either/or" options, because they artificially limit an issue or situation to two options when there are always more. Also be aware of people who overgeneralize, especially when those generalizations are based on stereotypical or prejudiced views. For example, the world is not just Republican or Democrat, male or female, pro-

life or pro-choice, or Christian or atheist.
- Evaluate the speaker's message instead of his or her appearance, personality, or other characteristics. Unless someone's appearance, personality, or behavior is relevant to an interaction, direct your criticism to the message.
- Be aware that critical evaluation isn't always quick or easy. Sometimes you may have to withhold judgment because your evaluation will take more time. Also keep in mind your evaluation may not be final, and you should be open to critical reflection and possible revision later.
- Avoid mind reading, which is assuming you know what the other person is going to say or that you know why they reached the conclusion they did. This leads to jumping to conclusions, which shortcuts the critical evaluation process.

Becoming a Better Empathetic Listener

A prominent scholar of empathetic listening describes it this way: "Empathetic listening is to be respectful of the dignity of others. Empathetic listening is a caring, a love of the wisdom to be found in others whoever they may be" (Bruneau, 1993). This quote conveys that empathetic listening is more philosophical than the other types of listening. It requires that we are open to subjectivity and that we engage in it because we genuinely see it as worthwhile.

Combining active and empathetic listening leads to active-empathetic listening. During active-empathetic listening a listener becomes actively and emotionally involved in an interaction in such a way that it is conscious on the part of the listener and perceived by the speaker (Bodie, 2011). To be a better empathetic listener, we need to suspend or at least attempt to suppress our judgment of the other person or their message so we can fully attend to both. Paraphrasing is an important part of empathetic listening, because it helps us put the other person's words into our frame of experience without making it about us. In addition, speaking the words of someone else in our own way can help evoke within us the feelings that the other person felt while saying them (Bodie, 2011). Active-empathetic listening is more than echoing back verbal messages. We can also engage in mirroring, which refers to a listener's replication of the nonverbal signals of a speaker (Bruneau, 1993). Therapists, for example, are often taught to adopt a posture and tone similar to their patients in order to build rapport and project empathy.



Empathetic listeners should not steal the spotlight from the speaker. Offer support without offering your own story or advice. Blondinrikard Froberg – Spotlight – CC BY 2.0.

Paraphrasing and questioning are useful techniques for empathetic listening because they allow us to respond to a speaker without taking "the floor," or the attention, away for long. Specifically, questions that ask for elaboration act as "verbal door openers," and inviting someone to speak more and then validating their speech through active listening cues can help a person feel "listened to" (Hargie, 2011). I've found that paraphrasing and asking questions are also useful when we feel tempted to share our own stories and experiences rather than maintaining our listening role. These questions aren't intended to solicit more information, so we can guide or direct the speaker toward a specific course of action. Although it is easier for us to slip into an advisory mode—saying things like "Well if I were you, I would..."—we have to resist the temptation to give unsolicited advice.

Empathetic listening can be worthwhile, but it also brings challenges. In terms of costs, empathetic listening can use up time and effort. Since this type of listening can't be contained within a proscribed time frame, it may be especially difficult for time-

oriented listeners (Bruneau, 1993). Empathetic listening can also be a test of our endurance, as its orientation toward and focus on supporting the other requires the processing and integration of much verbal and nonverbal information. Because of this potential strain, it's important to know your limits as an empathetic listener. While listening can be therapeutic, it is not appropriate for people without training and preparation to try to serve as a therapist. Some people have chronic issues that necessitate professional listening for the purposes of evaluation, diagnosis, and therapy. Lending an ear is different from diagnosing and treating. If you have a friend who is exhibiting signs of a more serious issue that needs attention, listen to the extent that you feel comfortable and then be prepared to provide referrals to other resources that have training to help. To face these challenges, good empathetic listeners typically have a generally positive self-concept and self-esteem, are nonverbally sensitive and expressive, and are comfortable with embracing another person's subjectivity and refraining from too much analytic thought.

Active, critical, and empathetic listening skills can be helpful in a variety of contexts. Understanding the role that listening plays in professional, relational, cultural, and gendered contexts can help us more competently apply these skills. Whether we are listening to or evaluating messages from a supervisor, parent, or intercultural conversational partner, we have much to gain or lose based on our ability to apply listening skills and knowledge in various contexts.

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5.6: Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter 5 Review

Why Listening Matters

- We spend more time listening than any other communication activity—about half our day. Strong listening boosts grades, job performance (and promotion odds), and relationship quality.
- Listening supports key goals: learning, connecting, shaping identity, and navigating everyday decisions.

The Listening Process (What's happening in your head and body)

- Receiving: Taking in sound and visual cues; manage environmental and psychological noise.
- Interpreting: Making meaning using context and prior knowledge (schemata).
- Recalling: Moving information from short-term to long-term memory; expect limits and use strategies to remember.
- Evaluating: Judging credibility, completeness, and value; keep focus on the message, not the person.
- Responding: Showing you're listening via verbal/nonverbal feedback, back-channel cues, clarifying questions, and paraphrasing.

Types of Listening (Use the right tool for the job)

- Discriminative: Scanning for specific cues (e.g., hearing your name in a crowd).
- Informational: Learning and retaining (e.g., lectures, instructions).
- Critical: Analyzing logic/evidence, separating facts from inferences (e.g., news, persuasive talks).
- Empathetic: Understanding feelings/perspectives without rushing to fix (e.g., a friend venting).

Listening Styles (How people tend to listen)

- People-oriented: Supportive, feelings-first.
- Action-oriented: Organized, task-focused.
- Content-oriented: Deep-dive, details and multiple perspectives.
- Time-oriented: Brief and efficient; may rush others.

Barriers to Effective Listening (What gets in the way)

- Environmental/physical: Poor seating, noise, fatigue.
- Cognitive/personal: Thought-speed > speech-speed, multitasking, low motivation.
- Message/speaker issues: Disorganized content, jargon, overload.
- Bias/prejudice: Prejudging the person or topic.
- Bad habits: Interrupting, distorted/narcissistic/aggressive listening, eavesdropping, pseudo-listening.

Improving Listening Competence (What to do instead)

- Before: Set a purpose, manage noise, sit where you can see/hear, prime attention.
- During:
  - Active listening behaviors: eye contact, open posture, head nods, brief encouragers.
  - Paraphrase + clarify: "So you're saying... Did I get that right?"
  - Use your "extra" brain bandwidth wisely: repeat, rephrase, reorganize.
  - Note-taking and mental bracketing to park distracting thoughts.
- Critical listening moves: Separate facts/inferences, check sources, look for missing voices, watch for either/or traps and overgeneralizations.

- Empathetic listening moves: Suspend judgment, mirror feelings (not the spotlight), ask open-ended questions, avoid unsolicited advice.

Fast Self-Checks

- Can you summarize the speaker's main point in one sentence?
- What's fact vs. inference in what you just heard?
- Which barrier is strongest for you right now, and what's one tactic to counter it?

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6: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

6.1: Principles of Interpersonal Communication
6.2: Communicating in Relationships
6.3: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication
6.4: The Dark Side of Relationships
6.5: Chapter 6 Summary

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6.1: Principles of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- define interpersonal communication and explain why it matters for health, school, and work.
- use the Johari Window and relational dialectics to decide what to share as a relationship grows.
- identify the difference between confirming and disconfirming communication climates.
- compare the five conflict styles and choose the best one for a case.

In order to understand interpersonal communication, we must understand how interpersonal communication functions to meet our needs and goals and how our interpersonal communication connects to larger social and cultural systems. **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 has many implications for us in the real world. Interpersonal communication played an important role in human evolution. Early humans who lived in groups, rather than alone, were more likely to survive, which meant that those with the capability to develop interpersonal bonds were more likely to pass these traits on to the next generation (Leary, 2001). Interpersonal skills have a measurable impact on psychological and physical health. People with higher levels of interpersonal communication skills are better able to adapt to stress, have greater satisfaction in relationships and more friends, and have less depression and anxiety (Hargie, 2011). In fact, prolonged isolation has been shown to severely damage a human (Williams & Zadro, 2001). There have been documented cases of abandoned or neglected children, sometimes referred to as feral children, who survived using their animalistic instincts but suffered psychological and physical trauma as a result of their isolation (Candland, 1995). There are also examples of solitary confinement, which has become an ethical issue in many countries. In "supermax" prisons, which now operate in at least forty-four states, prisoners spend 22.5 to 24 hours a day in their cells and have no contact with the outside world or other prisoners (Shalev, 2011).

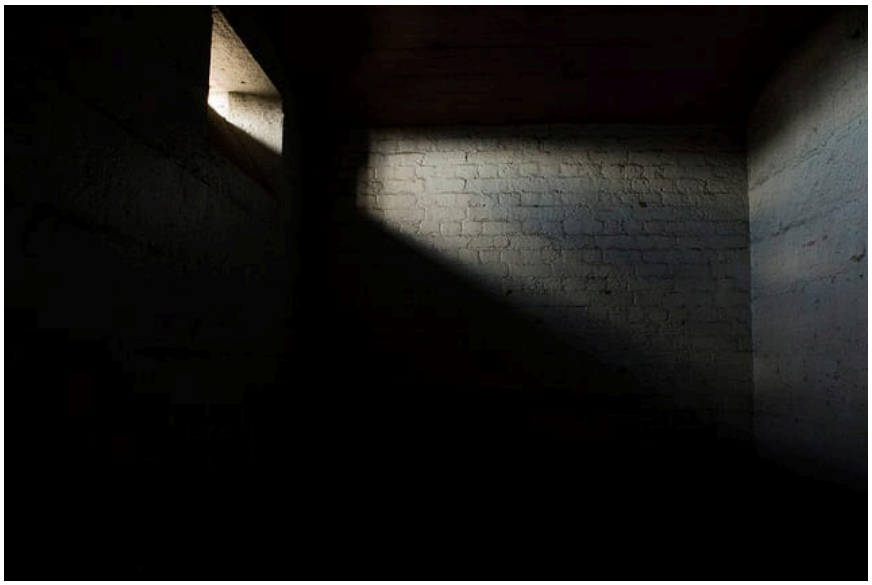


Figure 6.1.1: Solitary confinement is common in supermax prisons, where prisoners spend 22.5 to 24 hours a day in their cells. Jmiller291 – Solitary Confinement, Old Geelong Gaol 7 – CC BY 2.0.

Aside from making your relationships and health better, interpersonal communication skills are highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010). Each of these examples illustrates how interpersonal communication meets our basic needs as humans for security in our social bonds, health, and careers. But we are not born with all the interpersonal communication skills we'll need in life. So in order to make the most out of our interpersonal relationships, we must learn some basic principles.

Think about a time when a short communication exchange affected a relationship almost immediately. Did you mean for it to happen? Many times we engage in interpersonal communication to fulfill certain goals we may have, but sometimes we are more successful than others. This is because interpersonal communication is strategic, meaning we intentionally create messages to achieve certain goals that help us function in society and our relationships. Goals vary based on the situation and the communicators, but ask yourself if you are generally successful at achieving the goals with which you enter a conversation or not. If so, you may already possess a high degree of interpersonal communication competence, or the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in personal relationships. This chapter will help you understand some key processes that can make us more effective and appropriate communicators. You may be asking, "Aren't effectiveness and appropriateness the same thing?" The answer is no. Imagine that you are the manager of a small department of employees at a marketing agency where you often have to work on deadlines. As a deadline approaches, you worry about your team's ability to work without your supervision to complete the tasks, so you interrupt everyone's work and assign them all individual tasks and give them a bulleted list of each subtask with a deadline to turn each part in to you. You meet the deadline and have effectively accomplished your goal. Over the next month, one of your employees puts in her two-weeks' notice, and you learn that she and a few others have been talking about how they struggle to work with you as a manager. Although your strategy was effective, many people do not respond well to strict hierarchy or micromanaging and may have deemed your communication inappropriate. A more competent communicator could have implemented the same detailed plan to accomplish the task in a manner that included feedback, making the employees feel more included and heard. In order to be competent interpersonal communicators, we must learn to balance being effective and appropriate.

Functional Aspects of Interpersonal Communication

We have different needs that are met through our various relationships. Whether we are aware of it or not, we often ask ourselves, "What can this relationship do for me?" In order to understand how relationships achieve strategic functions, we will look at instrumental goals, relationship-maintenance goals, and self-presentation goals.

Instrumental Goals

We frequently engage in communication designed to achieve instrumental goals such as gaining compliance (getting someone to do something for us), getting information we need, or asking for support (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). In short, instrumental

talk helps us “get things done” in our relationships. Our instrumental goals can be long term or day to day. The following are examples of communicating for instrumental goals:

- You ask your friend to help you move this weekend (gaining/resisting compliance).
- You ask your coworker to remind you how to balance your cash register till at the end of your shift (requesting or presenting information).
- You console your roommate after he loses his job (asking for or giving support).

Relational Goals

When we communicate to achieve relational goals, we are striving to maintain a positive relationship. Engaging in relationship-maintenance communication is like taking your car to be serviced at the repair shop. To have a good relationship, just as to have a long-lasting car, we should engage in routine maintenance. For example, have you ever wanted to stay in and order a pizza and watch a movie, but your friend suggests that you go to a local restaurant and then to the theatre? Maybe you don’t feel like being around a lot of people or spending money (or changing out of your pajamas), but you decide to go along with his or her suggestion. In that moment, you are putting your relational partner’s needs above your own, which will likely make him or her feel valued. It is likely that your friend has made or will also make similar concessions to put your needs first, which indicates that there is a satisfactory and complimentary relationship. Obviously, if one partner always insists on having his or her way or always concedes, becoming the martyr, the individuals are not exhibiting interpersonal-communication competence. Other routine relational tasks include celebrating special occasions or honoring accomplishments, spending time together, and checking in regularly by phone, e-mail, text, social media, or face-to-face communication. The following are examples of communicating for relational goals:

- You organize an office party for a coworker who has just become a US citizen (celebrating/honoring accomplishments).
- You make breakfast with your mom while you are home visiting (spending time together).
- You post a message on your long-distance friend’s Facebook wall saying you miss him (checking in).



Figure 6.1.2: Gathering to celebrate a colleague’s birthday is a good way for coworkers to achieve relational goals in the workplace. Twingly – Happy b-day – CC BY 2.0.

Another form of relational talk is the DTR talk, which stands for “defining-the-relationship talk” and serves a relationship-maintenance function. In the early stages of a romantic relationship, you may have a DTR talk to reduce uncertainty about where you stand by deciding to use the term *boyfriend*, *girlfriend*, or *partner*. In a DTR talk, you may proactively define your relationship by saying, “I’m glad I’m with you and no one else.” Your romantic interest may respond favorably, echoing or rephrasing your statement, which gives you an indication that he or she agrees with you. The talk may continue on from there, and you may talk about what to call your relationship, set boundaries, or not. It is not unusual to have several DTR talks as a relationship progresses. At times, you may have to define the relationship when someone steps over a line by saying, “I think we should just be friends.” This more explicit and reactive (rather than proactive) communication can be especially useful in situations where a relationship may be unethical, inappropriate, or create a conflict of interest—for example, in a supervisor-supervisee, mentor-mentee, professional-client, or collegial relationship.

Self-presentation Goals

We also pursue self-presentation goals by adapting our communication in order to be perceived in particular ways. Just as many companies, celebrities, and politicians create a public image, we desire to present different faces in different contexts. The well-known 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. A parent may perform the role of stern head of household, supportive shoulder to cry on, or hip and culturally aware friend to his or her child. A newly hired employee may initially perform the role of serious and agreeable coworker. Sometimes people engage in communication that doesn't necessarily present them in a positive way. For example, Haley, the oldest daughter in the television show *Modern Family*, often presents herself as incapable in order to get her parents to do her work. In one episode she pretended she didn't know how to crack open an egg so her mom Claire would make the brownies for her school bake sale. Here are some other examples of communicating to meet self-presentation goals:

- As your boss complains about struggling to format the company newsletter, you tell her about your experience with Microsoft Word and editing and offer to look over the newsletter once she's done to fix the formatting (presenting yourself as competent).
- You and your new college roommate stand in your dorm room full of boxes. You let him choose which side of the room he wants and then invite him to eat lunch with you (presenting yourself as friendly).
- You say, "I don't know," in response to a professor's question even though you have an idea of the answer (presenting yourself as aloof, or "too cool for school").

As if managing instrumental, relational, and self-presentation goals isn't difficult enough when we consider them individually, we must also realize that the three goal types are always working together. In some situations we may privilege instrumental goals over relational or self-presentation goals. For example, if your partner is offered a great job in another state and you decided to go with him or her, which will move you away from your job and social circle, you would be focusing on relational goals over instrumental or self-presentation goals. When you're facing a stressful situation and need your best friend's help and call saying, "Hurry and bring me a gallon of gas or I'm going to be late to work!" you are privileging instrumental goals over relational goals. Of course, if the person really is your best friend, you can try to smooth things over or make up for your shortness later. However, you probably wouldn't call your boss and bark a request to bring you a gallon of gas so you can get to work, because you likely want your boss to see you as dependable and likable, meaning you have focused on self-presentation goals.

The functional perspective of interpersonal communication indicates that we communicate to achieve certain goals in our relationships. We get things done in our relationships by communicating for instrumental goals. We maintain positive relationships through relational goals. We also strategically present ourselves in order to be perceived in particular ways. As our goals are met and our relationships build, they become little worlds we inhabit with our relational partners, complete with their own relationship cultures.

Cultural Aspects of Interpersonal Communication

Aside from functional aspects of interpersonal communication, communicating in relationships also helps establish relationship cultures. Just as large groups of people create cultures through shared symbols (language), values, and rituals, people in relationships also create cultures at a smaller level. **Relationship cultures** are *the climates established through interpersonal communication that are unique to the relational partners but based on larger cultural and social norms*. We also enter into new relationships with expectations based on the schemata we have developed in previous relationships and learned from our larger society and culture. Think of relationship schemata as blueprints or plans that show the inner workings of a relationship. Just like a schematic or diagram for assembling a new computer desk helps you put it together, relationship schemata guide us in how we believe our interpersonal relationships should work and how to create them. So from our life experiences in our larger cultures, we bring building blocks, or expectations, into our relationships, which fundamentally connect our relationships to the outside world (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). Even though we experience our relationships as unique, they are at least partially built on preexisting cultural norms. Some additional communicative acts that create our relational cultures include relational storytelling, personal idioms, routines and rituals, and rules and norms

Storytelling

Storytelling is an important part of how we create culture in larger contexts and how we create a uniting and meaningful storyline for our relationships. In fact, an anthropologist coined the term *homo narrans* to describe the unique storytelling capability of modern humans (Fisher, 1985). We often rely on relationship storytelling to create a sense of stability in the face of change,

test the compatibility of potential new relational partners, or create or maintain solidarity in established relationships. Think of how you use storytelling among your friends, family, coworkers, and other relational partners. If you recently moved to a new place for college, you probably experienced some big changes. One of the first things you started to do was reestablish a social network—remember, human beings are fundamentally social creatures. As you began to encounter new people in your classes, at your new job, or in your new housing, you most likely told some stories of your life before—about your friends, job, or teachers back home. One of the functions of this type of storytelling, early in forming interpersonal bonds, is a test to see if the people you are meeting have similar stories or can relate to your previous relationship cultures. In short, you are testing the compatibility of your schemata with the new people you encounter. Although storytelling will continue to play a part in your relational development with these new people, you may be surprised at how quickly you start telling stories with your new friends about things that have happened since you met. You may recount stories about your first trip to the dance club together, the weird geology professor you had together, or the time you all got sick from eating the cafeteria food. In short, your old stories will start to give way to new stories that you've created. Storytelling within relationships helps create solidarity, or a sense of belonging and closeness. This type of storytelling can be especially meaningful for relationships that don't fall into the dominant culture. For example, research on a gay male friendship circle found that the gay men retold certain dramatic stories frequently to create a sense of belonging and to also bring in new members to the group (Jones Jr., 2007).

Personal Idioms

We also create personal idioms in our relationships (Bell & Healey, 1992). If you've ever studied foreign languages, you know that idiomatic expressions like "I'm under the weather today" are basically nonsense when translated. For example, the equivalent of this expression in French translates to "I'm not in my plate today." When you think about it, it doesn't make sense to use either expression to communicate that you're sick, but the meaning would not be lost on English or French speakers, because they can decode their respective idiom. This is also true of idioms we create in our interpersonal relationships. Just as idioms are unique to individual cultures and languages, personal idioms are unique to certain relationships, and they create a sense of belonging due to the inside meaning shared by the relational partners. In romantic relationships, for example, it is common for individuals to create nicknames for each other that may not directly translate for someone who overhears them. You and your partner may find that calling each other "booger" is sweet, while others may think it's gross. Researchers have found that personal idioms are commonly used in the following categories: activities, labels for others, requests, and sexual references (Bell & Healey, 1992). The cultural phenomenon *Jersey Shore* on MTV has given us plenty of examples of personal idioms created by the friends on the show. *GTL* is an activity idiom that stands for "gym, tan, laundry"—a common routine for the cast of the show. There are many examples of idioms labeling others, including *grenade* for an unattractive female, *gorilla juice head* for a very muscular man, and *backpack* for a clingy boyfriend/girlfriend or a clingy person at a club. There are also many idioms for sexual references, such as *smush*, meaning to hook up / have sex, and *smush room*, which is the room set aside for these activities (Benigno, 2010). Idioms help create cohesiveness, or solidarity in relationships, because they are shared cues between cultural insiders. They also communicate the uniqueness of the relationship and create boundaries, since meaning is only shared within the relationship.

Routines and Rituals

Routines and rituals help form relational cultures through their natural development in repeated or habitual interaction (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). While "routine" may connote boring in some situations, **relationship routines** are *communicative acts that create a sense of predictability in a relationship that is comforting*. Some communicative routines may develop around occasions or conversational topics. For example, it is common for long-distance friends or relatives to schedule a recurring phone conversation or for couples to review the day's events over dinner. I have my parents over for dinner every Sunday, which has established a comfortable routine for us. Other routines develop around entire conversational episodes. For example, two best friends recounting their favorite spring-break story may seamlessly switch from one speaker to the other, finish each other's sentences, speak in unison, or gesture simultaneously because they have told the story so many times. **Relationship rituals** *take on more symbolic meaning than do relationship routines and may be variations on widely recognized events—such as birthdays, anniversaries, Passover, Christmas, or Thanksgiving—or highly individualized and original*. Relational partners may personalize their traditions by eating mussels and playing Yahtzee on Christmas Eve or going hiking on their anniversary. Other rituals may be more unique to the relationship, such as celebrating a dog's birthday or going to opening day at the amusement park.



Figure 6.1.3: Free Stock Photos – Cooking – public domain.

Whether the routines and rituals involve phone calls, eating certain foods, or always celebrating birthdays together, they all serve important roles in building relational cultures. However, as with storytelling, rituals and routines can be negative. For example, verbal and nonverbal patterns to berate or belittle your relational partner will not have healthy effects on a relational culture. Additionally, visiting your in-laws during the holidays loses its symbolic value when you dislike them and comply with the ritual because you feel like you have to. In this case, the ritual doesn't enrich the relational culture, but it may reinforce norms or rules that have been created in the relationship.

Rules and Norms

Relationship rules and norms help with the daily function of the relationship. They help create structure and provide boundaries for interacting in the relationship and for interacting with larger social networks (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). Relationship rules are explicitly communicated guidelines for what should and should not be done in certain contexts. A couple could create a rule to always confer with each other before letting their child spend the night somewhere else. If a mother lets her son sleep over at a friend's house without consulting her partner, a more serious conflict could result. Relationship norms are similar to routines and rituals in that they develop naturally in a relationship and generally conform to or are adapted from what is expected and acceptable in the larger culture or society. For example, it may be a norm that you and your coworkers do not "talk shop" at your Friday happy-hour gathering. So when someone brings up work at the gathering, his coworkers may remind him that there's no shop talk, and the consequences may not be that serious. In regards to topic of conversation, norms often guide expectations of what subjects are appropriate within various relationships. Do you talk to your boss about your personal finances? Do you talk to your father about your sexual activity? Do you tell your classmates about your medical history? In general, there are no rules that say you can't discuss any of these topics with anyone you choose, but relational norms usually lead people to answer "no" to the questions above. Violating relationship norms and rules can negatively affect a relationship, but in general, rule violations can lead to more direct conflict, while norm violations can lead to awkward social interactions. Developing your interpersonal communication competence will help you assess your communication in relation to the many rules and norms you will encounter.

Interpersonal communication is more than talking—it is the ongoing exchange of messages between people whose lives and identities shape one another within wider social and cultural norms. Studying it matters because it supports our well-being and success. In everyday interactions we pursue instrumental, relational, and self-presentation goals, often at the same time, and our choices gradually build "relationship cultures" through shared stories, insider idioms, routines and rituals, and agreed-upon rules and norms. Recognizing which goal you're prioritizing, what norms apply, and how your message may be received helps you adapt with purpose rather than by habit.

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6.2: Communicating in Relationships

Every close relationship is a negotiation—between what we reveal and what we hold back, between independence and intimacy, and within the emotional climate that makes candor possible. In this section, we examine the dynamics of self-disclosure, the everyday tensions partners balance, and the interactional tone that signals safety or threat. Seen together, these threads explain why some conversations deepen trust while others stall, even when the facts seem the same.

Self-Disclosure

Because interpersonal communication is the primary means by which we get to know others as unique individuals, it is important to understand the role of self-disclosure. **Self-disclosure** is the *process of revealing information about yourself to others that is not readily known by them*—you have to disclose it. In face-to-face interactions, telling someone "I am a white woman" would not be self-disclosure because that person can perceive that about you without being told. However, revealing, "I am an avid surfer" or "My favorite kind of music is "electronic trance" would be examples of self-disclosure because these are pieces of personal information others do not know unless you tell them. Given that our definition of interpersonal communication requires people to "build knowledge of one another" to get to know them as unique individuals, the necessity for self-disclosure should be obvious.

There are degrees of self-disclosure, ranging from relatively safe (revealing your hobbies or musical preferences), to more personal topics (illuminating fears, dreams for the future, or fantasies). Typically, as relationships deepen and trust is established, self-disclosure increases in both breadth and depth. We tend to disclose facts about ourselves first (I am a Biology major), then move towards opinions (I feel the war is wrong), and finally disclose feelings (I'm sad that you said that). An important aspect of self-disclosure is the rule of reciprocity. This rule states that self-disclosure between two people works best in a back and forth fashion. When you tell someone something personal, you probably expect them to do the same. When one person reveals more than another, there can be an imbalance in the relationship because the one who self discloses more may feel vulnerable as a result of sharing more personal information.

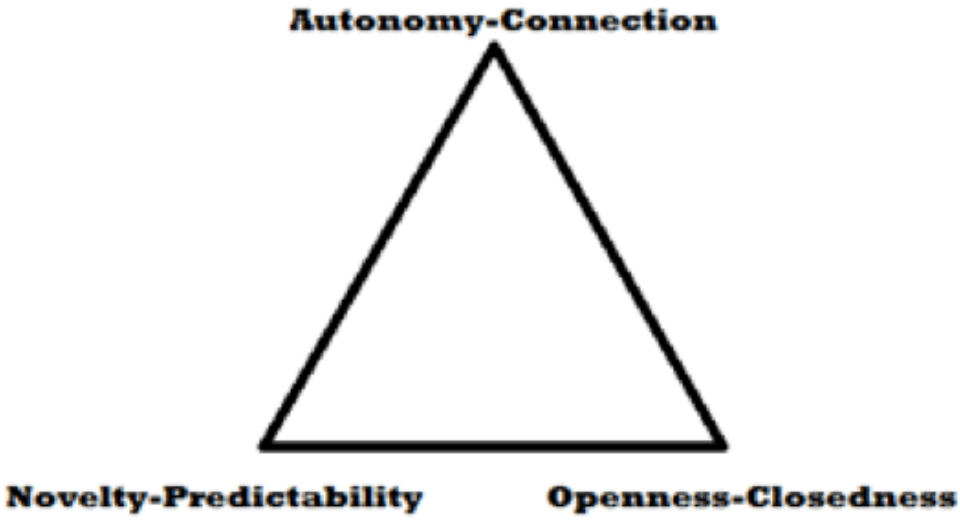
One way to visualize self-disclosure is the Johari Window which comes from combining the first names of the window's creators, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham. The window is divided into four quadrants: the arena, the blind spot, the facade, and the unknown (Luft).

The arena area contains information that is known to us and to others, such as our height, hair color, occupation, or major. In general, we are comfortable discussing or revealing these topics with most people. Information in the blind spot includes those things that may be apparent to others, yet we are unaware of it in ourselves. The habit of playing with your hair when nervous may be a habit that others have observed but you have not. The third area, the façade, contains information that is hidden from others but is known to you. Previous mistakes or failures, embarrassing moments, or family history are topics we typically hold close and reveal only in the context of safe, long-term relationships. Finally, the unknown area contains information that neither others, nor we, know about. We cannot know how we will react when a parent dies or just what we will do after graduation until the experience occurs. Knowing about ourselves, especially our blind and unknown areas, enables us to have a healthy, well-rounded self-concept. As we make choices to self-disclose to others, we are engaging in negotiating relational dialectics.

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

Relational Dialectics

One way we can better understand our personal relationships is by understanding the notion of relational dialectics. Baxter describes three relational dialectics that are constantly at play in interpersonal relationships. Essentially, they are a continuum of needs for each participant in a relationship that must be negotiated by those involved. Let's take a closer look at the three primary relational dialectics that are at work in all interpersonal relationships.



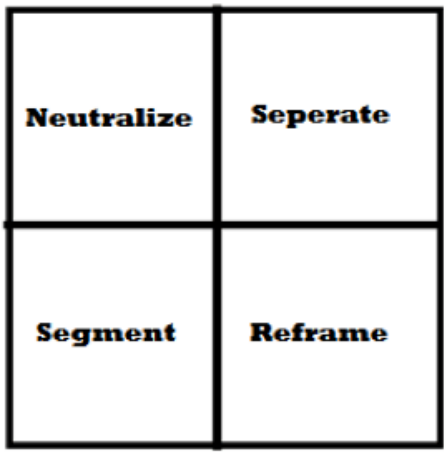
- **Autonomy-Connection** refers to our *need to have close connection with others as well as our need to have our own space and identity*. We may miss our romantic partner when they are away but simultaneously enjoy and cherish that alone time. When you first enter a romantic relationship, you probably want to be around the other person as much as possible. As the relationship grows, you likely begin to desire fulfilling your need for autonomy, or alone time. In every relationship, each person must balance how much time to spend with the other, versus how much time to spend alone.

- **Novelty-Predictability** is the idea that *we desire predictability as well as spontaneity in our relationships*. In every relationship, we take comfort in a certain level of routine as a way of knowing what we can count on in regards to the other person in the relationship. Such predictability provides a sense of comfort and security. However, it requires balance with novelty to avoid boredom. An example of balance might be friends who get together every Saturday for brunch, but make a commitment to always try new restaurants each week.

- **Openness-Closedness** refers to *the desire to be open and honest with others while at the same time not wanting to reveal every thing about yourself to someone else*. One's desire for privacy does not mean they are shutting out others. It is a normal human need. We tend to disclose the most personal information to those with whom we have the closest relationships. However, even these people do not know everything about us. As the old saying goes, "We all have skeletons in our closet," and that's okay.

How We Handle Relational Dialectics

Understanding that these three dialectical tensions are at play in all relationships is a first step in understanding how our relationships work. However, awareness alone is not enough. Couples, friends, or family members have strategies for managing these tensions in an attempt to meet the needs of each person. Baxter identifies four ways we can handle dialectical tensions.



4 Ways to Handle Dialectical Tension

The first option is to **neutralize** the extremes of the dialectical tensions. Here, *individuals compromise, creating a solution where neither person's need (such as novelty or predictability) is fully satisfied*. Individual needs may be different, and never fully realized. For example, if one person seeks a great deal of autonomy, and the other person in the relationship seeks a great deal of connection, neutralization would not make it possible for either person to have their desires met. Instead, each person might feel like they are not getting quite enough of their particular need met.

The second option is **separation**. This is when someone *favors one end of the dialectical continuum and ignores the other, or alternates between the extremes*. For example, a couple in a commuter relationship in which each person works in a different city may decide to live apart during the week (autonomy) and be together on the weekends (connection). In this sense, they are alternating between the extremes by being completely alone during the week, yet completely together on the weekends.

When people decide to *divide their lives into spheres* they are practicing **segmentation**. For example, your extended family may be very close and choose to spend religious holidays together. However, members of your extended family might reserve other special days such as birthdays for celebrating with friends. This approach divides needs according to the different segments of your life.

The final option for dealing with these tensions is **reframing**. This strategy requires creativity not only in managing the tensions, but understanding how they work in the relationship. For example, *the two ends of the dialectic are not viewed as opposing or contradictory* at all. Instead, they are understood as supporting the other need, as well as the relationship itself. A couple who does not live together, for example, may agree to spend two nights of the week alone or with friends as a sign of their autonomy. The time spent alone or with others gives each person the opportunity to develop themselves and their own interests so that they are better able to share themselves with their partner and enhance their connection.

In general, there is no one right way to understand and manage dialectical tensions since every relationship is unique. However, to always satisfy one need and ignore the other may be a sign of trouble in the relationship (Baxter). It is important to remember that relational dialectics are a natural part of our relationships and that we have a lot of choice, freedom, and creativity in how we work

them out with our relational partners. It is also important to remember that dialectical tensions are negotiated differently in each relationship. The ways we self disclose and manage dialectical tensions contributes greatly to what we call the communication climate in relationships.

Communication Climates

"Sticks and Stones Can Beak my Bones But Words Can Hurt Me Too"

In a study published in the journal *Science*, researchers reported that the sickening feeling we get when we are socially rejected (being ignored at a party or passed over when picking teams) is real. When researchers measured brain responses to social stress they found a pattern similar to what occurs in the brain when our body experiences physical pain. Specifically, "the area affected is the anterior cingulated cortex, a part of the brain known to be involved in the emotional response to pain" (Fox). The doctor who conducted the study, Matt Lieberman, a social psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, said, "It makes sense for humans to be programmed this way. . .Social interaction is important to survival."

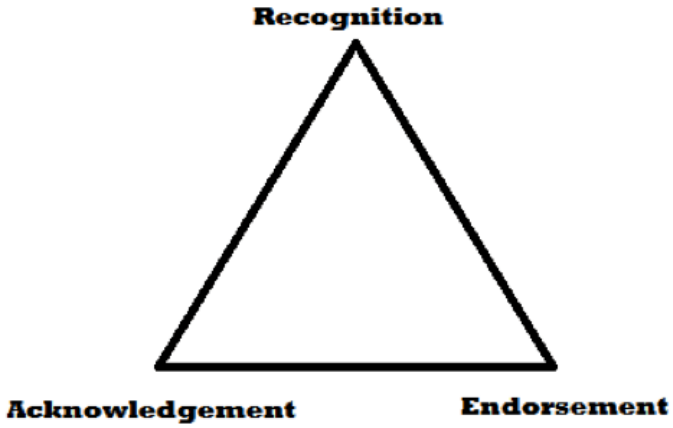
Do you feel organized, or confined, in a clean workspace? Are you more productive when the sun is shining than when it's gray and cloudy outside? Just as factors like weather and physical space impact us, communication climate influences our interpersonal interactions. **Communication climate** is the *"overall feeling or emotional mood between people"* (Wood 245). If you dread going to visit your family during the holidays because of tension between you and your sister, or you look forward to dinner with a particular set of friends because they make you laugh, you are responding to the communication climate—the overall mood that is created because of the people involved and the type of communication they bring to the interaction. Let's look at two different types of communication climates: Confirming and Disconfirming climates.

Confirming and Disconfirming Climates

Positive and negative climates can be understood along three dimensions—recognition, acknowledgement, and endorsement. We experience **Confirming Climates** when we receive *messages that demonstrate our value and worth from those with whom we have a relationship*. Conversely, we experience **Disconfirming Climates** when we receive *messages that suggest we are devalued and unimportant*. Obviously, most of us like to be in confirming climates because they foster emotional safety as well as personal and relational growth. However, it is likely that your relationships fall somewhere between the two extremes. Let's look at three types of messages that create confirming and disconfirming climates.

- **Recognition Messages**: Recognition *messages either confirm or deny another person's existence*. For example, if a friend enters your home and you smile, hug him, and say, "I'm so glad to see you" you are confirming his existence. If you say "good morning" to a colleague and she ignores you by walking out of the room without saying anything, she is creating a disconfirming climate by not recognizing you as a unique individual.

- **Acknowledgement Messages**: Acknowledgement messages go beyond recognizing another's existence by *confirming what they say or how they feel*. Nodding our head while listening, or laughing appropriately at a funny story, are nonverbal acknowledgement messages. When a friend tells you she had a really bad day at work and you respond with, "Yeah, that does sound hard, do you want to go somewhere quiet and talk?", you are acknowledging and responding to her feelings. In contrast, if you were to respond to your friend's frustrations with a comment like, "That's nothing. Listen to what happened to me today," you would be ignoring her experience and presenting yours as more important.



3 Types of Messages Shaping Communication Climates

- **Endorsement Messages**: Endorsement messages go one step further by *recognizing a person's feelings as valid*. Suppose a friend comes to you upset after a fight with his girlfriend. If you respond with, "Yeah, I can see why you would be upset" you are endorsing his right to feel upset. However, if you said, "Get over it. At least you have a girlfriend" you would be sending messages that deny his right to feel frustrated in that moment. While it is difficult to see people we care about in emotional pain, people are responsible for their own emotions. When we let people own their emotions and do not tell them how to feel, we are creating supportive climates that provide a safe environment for them to work though their problems.

Building competent relationships means integrating all three elements. Use self-disclosure to deepen understanding at an appropriate pace and depth; apply dialectical strategies to balance changing needs without defaulting to extremes; and attend to the climate you help create by consistently recognizing others, acknowledging their experiences, and endorsing their right to feel. Each element reinforces the others: supportive climates invite calibrated disclosure, skillful disclosure eases tension management, and effective tension management sustains a positive climate over time. As a practical habit, plan important interactions by asking three questions: What will I disclose and why? Which dialectical tension is most active and how will I manage it? What messages will set a confirming climate? Practicing this triad prepares you to communicate with clarity, flexibility, and care in diverse relational contexts.

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6.3: Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

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 away to go to college, 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 *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."

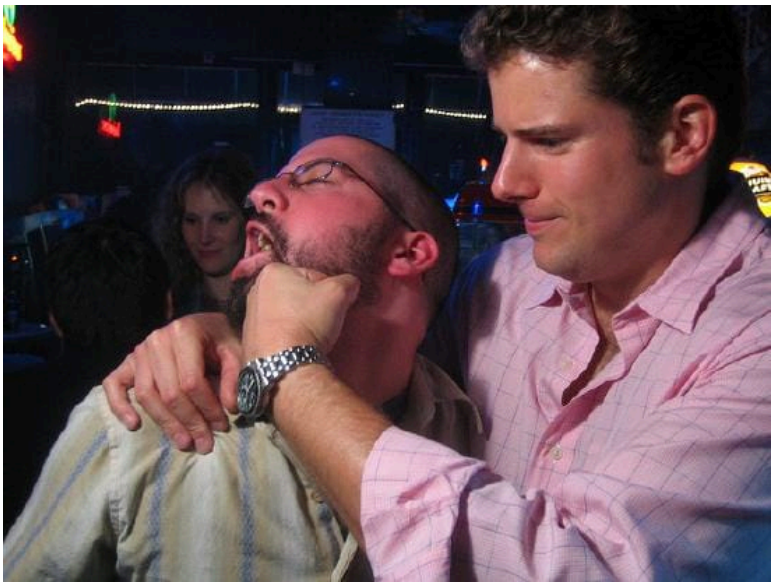


Figure 6.3.1: Interpersonal conflict is distinct from interpersonal violence, which goes beyond communication to include abuse. Bobafred – Fist Fight – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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 (Figure 6.3.2).



Figure 6.3.2: 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 or reminding him that they are saving for a summer vacation. 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 take 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 confiscation 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 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 houseguest. 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. So more frustration may develop when the hints and jokes are not decoded, which often leads to a more extreme form of hinting/joking: passive-aggressive behavior.

Passive-aggressive behavior is a 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. For example, Rosa may wait a few days to deposit money into the bank so D'Shaun can't withdraw it to give to Casey, or D'Shaun may cancel plans for a romantic dinner because he feels like Rosa is questioning his responsibility with money. Although passive-aggressive behavior can feel rewarding in the moment, it is one of the most unproductive ways to deal with conflict. These behaviors may create additional conflicts and may lead to a cycle of passive-aggressiveness in which the other partner begins to exhibit these behaviors as well, while never actually addressing the conflict that originated the behavior. In most avoidance situations, both parties lose. However, as noted above, avoidance can be the most appropriate strategy in some situations—for example, when the conflict is temporary, when the stakes are low or there is little personal investment, or when there is the potential for violence or retaliation.

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, "Let's just have it your way," 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).

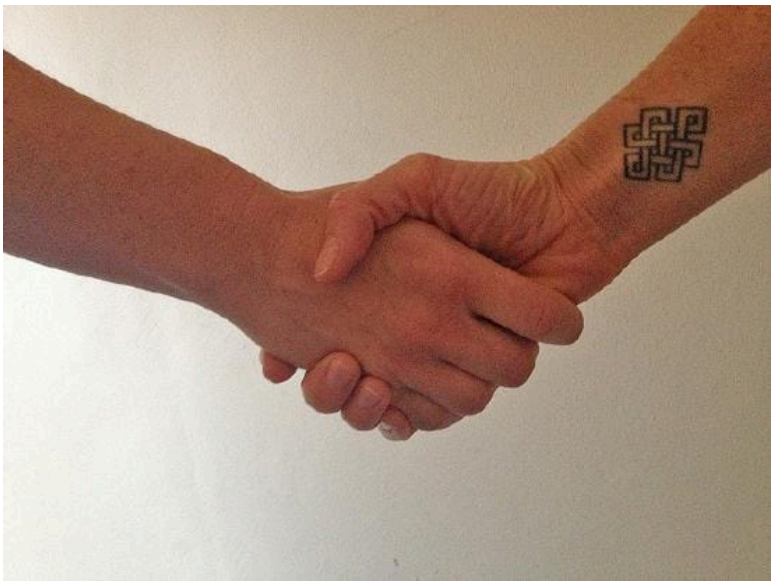


Figure 6.3.3: Compromising may help conflicting parties come to a resolution, but neither may be completely satisfied if they each had to give something up. Broad Bean Media – handshake – CC BY-SA 2.0.

A negative aspect 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.

Here are some tips for collaborating and achieving a win/win outcome (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

Culture is an important context to consider when studying conflict, and recent research has called into question some of the assumptions of the five conflict management styles discussed so far, which were formulated with a Western bias (Oetzel, Garcia,

& Ting-Toomey, 2008). For example, while the avoiding style of conflict has been cast as negative, with a low concern for self and other or as a lose/lose outcome, this research found that participants in the United States, Germany, China, and Japan all viewed avoiding strategies as demonstrating a concern for the other. While there are some generalizations we can make about culture and conflict, it is better to look at more specific patterns of how interpersonal communication and conflict management are related. We can better understand some of the cultural differences in conflict management by further examining the concept of *face*.

What does it mean to "save face?" This saying generally refers to preventing embarrassment or preserving our reputation or image, which is similar to the concept of face in interpersonal and intercultural communication. Our **face** is *the projected self we desire to put into the world*, and **facework** refers to *the communicative strategies we employ to project, maintain, or repair our face or maintain, repair, or challenge another's face*. **Face negotiation theor**y argues that *people in all cultures negotiate face through communication encounters, and that cultural factors influence how we engage in facework, especially in conflict situations* (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). These cultural factors influence whether we are more concerned with self-face or other-face and what types of conflict management strategies we may use. One key cultural influence on face negotiation is the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

The distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures is an important dimension across which all cultures vary. Individualist cultures like the United States and most of Europe emphasize individual identity over group identity and encourage competition and self-reliance. Collectivist cultures like Taiwan, Colombia, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Peru value in-group identity over individual identity and value conformity to social norms of the in-group (Dsilva & Whyte, 1998). However, within the larger cultures, *individuals will vary in the degree to which they view themselves as part of a group or as a separate individual*, which is called **self-construal**. **Independent self-construal** indicates a *perception of the self as an individual with unique feelings, thoughts, and motivations*. **Interdependent self-construal** indicates a *perception of the self as interrelated with others* (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Not surprisingly, people from individualist cultures are more likely to have higher levels of independent self-construal, and people from collectivist cultures are more likely to have higher levels of interdependent self-construal. Self-construal and individualist or collectivist cultural orientations affect how people engage in facework and the conflict management styles they employ.

Self-construal alone does not have a direct effect on conflict style, but it does affect face concerns, with independent self-construal favoring self-face concerns and interdependent self-construal favoring other-face concerns. There are specific facework strategies for different conflict management styles, and these strategies correspond to self-face concerns or other-face concerns.

- **Accommodating:** Giving in (self-face concern).
- **Avoiding:** Pretending conflict does not exist (other-face concern).
- **Competing:** Defending your position, persuading (self-face concern).
- **Collaborating:** Apologizing, having a private discussion, remaining calm (other-face concern) (Oetzel, Garcia, & Ting-Toomey, 2008).

Research done on college students in Germany, Japan, China, and the United States found that those with independent self-construal were more likely to engage in competing, and those with interdependent self-construal were more likely to engage in avoiding or collaborating (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). And in general, this research found that members of collectivist cultures were more likely to use the *avoiding* style of conflict management and less likely to use the *integrating* or *competing* styles of conflict management than were members of individualist cultures. The following examples bring together facework strategies, cultural orientations, and conflict management style: Someone from an individualistic culture may be more likely to engage in competing as a conflict management strategy if they are directly confronted, which may be an attempt to defend their reputation (self-face concern). Someone in a collectivistic culture may be more likely to engage in avoiding or accommodating in order not to embarrass or anger the person confronting them (other-face concern) or out of concern that their reaction could reflect negatively on their family or cultural group (other-face concern). While these distinctions are useful for categorizing large-scale cultural patterns, it is important not to essentialize or arbitrarily group countries together, because there are measurable differences within cultures. For example, expressing one's emotions was seen as demonstrating a low concern for other-face in Japan, but this was not so in China, which shows there is variety between similarly collectivist cultures. Culture always adds layers of complexity to any communication phenomenon, but experiencing and learning from other cultures also enriches our lives and makes us more competent communicators.

Handling Conflict Better

Conflict is inevitable and it is not inherently negative. A key part of developing interpersonal communication competence involves being able to effectively manage the conflict you will encounter in all your relationships. One key part of handling conflict better

is to notice patterns of conflict in specific relationships and to generally have an idea of what causes you to react negatively and what your reactions usually are.

Identifying Conflict Patterns

Much of the research on conflict patterns has been done on couples in romantic relationships, but the concepts and findings are applicable to other relationships. Four common triggers for conflict are criticism, demand, cumulative annoyance, and rejection (Christensen & Jacobson, 2000). We all know from experience that **criticism**, or *comments that evaluate another person's personality, behavior, appearance, or life choices*, may lead to conflict. Comments do not have to be meant as criticism to be perceived as such. If Gary comes home from college for the weekend and his mom says, "Looks like you put on a few pounds," she may view this as a statement of fact based on observation. Gary, however, may take the comment personally and respond negatively back to his mom, starting a conflict that will last for the rest of his visit. A simple but useful strategy to manage the trigger of criticism is to follow the old adage "Think before you speak." In many cases, there are alternative ways to phrase things that may be taken less personally, or we may determine that our comment doesn't need to be spoken at all. I've learned that a majority of the thoughts that we have about another person's physical appearance, whether positive or negative, do not need to be verbalized. Ask yourself, "What is my motivation for making this comment?" and "Do I have anything to lose by not making this comment?" If your underlying reasons for commenting are valid, perhaps there is another way to phrase your observation. If Gary's mom is worried about his eating habits and health, she could wait until they're eating dinner and ask him how he likes the food choices at school and what he usually eats.

Demands also frequently trigger conflict, especially if the demand is viewed as unfair or irrelevant. It's important to note that demands rephrased as questions may still be perceived as demands. Tone of voice and context are important factors here. When you were younger, you may have asked a parent, teacher, or elder for something and heard back "Ask nicely." As with criticism, thinking before you speak and before you respond can help manage demands and minimize conflict episodes. As we discussed earlier, demands are sometimes met with withdrawal rather than a verbal response. If you are doing the demanding, remember a higher level of information exchange may make your demand clearer or more reasonable to the other person. If you are being demanded of, responding calmly and expressing your thoughts and feelings are likely more effective than withdrawing, which may escalate the conflict.

Cumulative annoyance is *a building of frustration or anger that occurs over time*, eventually resulting in a conflict interaction. For example, your friend shows up late to drive you to class three times in a row. You didn't say anything the previous times, but on the third time you say, "You're late again! If you can't get here on time, I'll find another way to get to class." Cumulative annoyance can build up like a pressure cooker, and as it builds up, the intensity of the conflict also builds. Criticism and demands can also play into cumulative annoyance. We have all probably let critical or demanding comments slide, but if they continue, it becomes difficult to hold back, and most of us have a breaking point. The problem here is that all the other incidents come back to your mind as you confront the other person, which usually intensifies the conflict. You've likely been surprised when someone has blown up at you due to cumulative annoyance or surprised when someone you have blown up at didn't know there was a problem building. A good strategy for managing cumulative annoyance is to monitor your level of annoyance and occasionally let some steam out of the pressure cooker by processing through your frustration with a third party or directly addressing what is bothering you with the source.

No one likes the feeling of rejection. **Rejection** can lead to conflict when one person's *comments or behaviors are perceived as ignoring or invalidating the other person*. Vulnerability is a component of any close relationship. When we care about someone, we verbally or nonverbally communicate. We may tell our best friend that we miss them, or plan a home-cooked meal for our partner who is working late. The vulnerability that underlies these actions comes from the possibility that our relational partner will not notice or appreciate them. When someone feels exposed or rejected, they often respond with anger to mask their hurt, which ignites a conflict. Managing feelings of rejection is difficult because it is so personal, but controlling the impulse to assume that your relational partner is rejecting you, and engaging in communication rather than reflexive reaction, can help put things in perspective. If your partner doesn't get excited about the meal you planned and cooked, it could be because he or she is physically or mentally tired after a long day.

Interpersonal conflict may take the form of **serial arguing**, which is *a repeated pattern of disagreement over an issue*. Serial arguments do not necessarily indicate negative or troubled relationships, but any kind of patterned conflict is worth paying attention to. There are three patterns that occur with serial arguing: repeating, mutual hostility, and arguing with assurances (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). The first pattern is **repeating**, which means *reminding the other person of your complaint* (what you want them to start/stop doing). The pattern may continue if the other person repeats their response to your reminder. For example, if Marita reminds Kate that she doesn't appreciate her sarcastic tone, and Kate responds, "I'm soooo sorry, I forgot how perfect you are," then the reminder has failed to effect the desired change. A predictable pattern of complaint like this leads

participants to view the conflict as irresolvable. The second pattern within serial arguments is **mutual hostility**, which *occurs when the frustration of repeated conflict leads to negative emotions and increases the likelihood of verbal aggression*. Again, a predictable pattern of hostility makes the conflict seem irresolvable and may lead to relationship deterioration. Whereas these first two patterns entail an increase in pressure on the participants in the conflict, a third pattern offers some relief. If people in an interpersonal conflict offer **verbal assurances of their commitment** to the relationship, then the problems associated with the other two patterns of serial arguing may be ameliorated. Even though the conflict may not be solved in the interaction, the verbal assurances of commitment *imply that there is a willingness to work on solving the conflict in the future, which provides a sense of stability that can benefit the relationship*. Although serial arguing is not inherently bad within a relationship, if the pattern becomes more of a vicious cycle, it can lead to alienation, polarization, and an overall toxic climate, and the problem may seem so irresolvable that people feel trapped and terminate the relationship (Christensen & Jacobson, 2000). There are some negative, but common, conflict reactions we can monitor and try to avoid, which may also help prevent serial arguing.

Two common conflict pitfalls are one-upping and mindreading (Gottman, 1994). **One-upping** is a *quick reaction to communication from another person that escalates the conflict*. If Sam comes home late from work and Nicki says, "I wish you would call when you're going to be late" and Sam responds, "I wish you would get off my back," the reaction has escalated the conflict. **Mindreading** is *communication in which one person attributes something to the other using generalizations*. If Sam says, "You don't care whether I come home at all or not!" she is presuming to know Nicki's thoughts and feelings. Nicki is likely to respond defensively, perhaps saying, "You don't know how I'm feeling!" One-upping and mindreading are often reactions that are more reflexive than deliberate. Perception checking can help in these moments. Nicki may have received bad news and was eager to get support from Sam when she arrived home. Although Sam perceives Nicki's comment as criticism and justifies her comments as a reaction to Nicki's behavior, Nicki's comment could actually be a sign of their closeness, in that Nicki appreciates Sam's emotional support. Sam could have said, "I know, I'm sorry, I was on my cell phone for the past hour with a client who had a lot of problems to work out." Taking a moment to respond mindfully rather than react with a knee-jerk reflex can lead to information exchange, which could deescalate the conflict.



Figure 6.3.4: Mindreading leads to patterned conflict, because we wrongly presume to know what another person is thinking. Slipperroom – Mysterion the Mind Reader – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Validating the person with whom you are in conflict can be an effective way to deescalate conflict. While avoiding or retreating may seem like the best option in the moment, one of the key negative traits found in research on married couples' conflicts was withdrawal, which as we learned before may result in a demand-withdrawal pattern of conflict. Often validation can be as simple as demonstrating good listening skills discussed earlier in this book by making eye contact and giving verbal and nonverbal back-channel cues like saying "mmm-hmm" or nodding your head (Gottman, 1994). This doesn't mean that you have to give up your own side in a conflict or that you agree with what the other person is saying; rather, you are hearing the other person out, which validates them and may also give you some more information about the conflict that could minimize the likelihood of a reaction rather than a response.

Negotiation Steps and Skills

We negotiate daily. We may negotiate with a professor to make up a missed assignment or with our friends to plan activities for the weekend. **Negotiation** in interpersonal conflict refers to *the process of attempting to change or influence conditions within a relationship.* The negotiation skills discussed next can be adapted to a wide range of relational contexts, from romantic partners to coworkers. The stages of negotiating are prenegotiation, opening, exploration, bargaining, and settlement (Hargie, 2011).

In the **prenegotiation stage**, you want to prepare for the encounter. If possible, let the other person know you would like to talk to them, and preview the topic, so they will also have the opportunity to prepare. While it may seem awkward to "set a date" to talk about a conflict, if the other person feels like they were blindsided, their reaction could be negative. Make your preview simple and nonthreatening by saying something like "I've noticed that we've been arguing a lot about who does what chores around the house. Can we sit down and talk tomorrow when we both get home from class?" Obviously, it won't always be feasible to set a date if the conflict needs to be handled immediately because the consequences are immediate or if you or the other person has limited availability. In that case, you can still prepare, but make sure you allot time for the other person to digest and respond. During this stage you also want to figure out your goals for the interaction by reviewing your instrumental, relational, and self-presentation goals. Is getting something done, preserving the relationship, or presenting yourself in a certain way the most important? For example, you may highly rank the instrumental goal of having a clean house, or the relational goal of having pleasant interactions with your roommate, or the self-presentation goal of appearing nice and cooperative. Whether your roommate is your best friend from high school or a stranger the school matched you up with could determine the importance of your relational and self-presentation goals. At this point, your goal analysis may lead you away from negotiation—remember, as we discussed earlier, avoiding can be an appropriate and effective conflict management strategy. If you decide to proceed with the negotiation, you will want to determine your ideal outcome and your bottom line, or the point at which you decide to break off negotiation. It's very important that you realize there is a range between your ideal and your bottom line and that remaining flexible is key to a successful negotiation—remember, through collaboration a new solution could be found that you didn't think of.

In the **opening stage** of the negotiation, you want to set the tone for the interaction because the other person will be likely to reciprocate. Generally, it is good to be cooperative and pleasant, which can help open the door for collaboration. You also want to establish common ground by bringing up overlapping interests and using "we" language. It would not be competent to open the negotiation with "You're such a slob! Didn't your mom ever teach you how to take care of yourself?" Instead, you may open the negotiation by making small talk about classes that day and then move into the issue at hand. You could set a good tone and establish common ground by saying, "We both put a lot of work into setting up and decorating our space, but now that classes have started, I've noticed that we're really busy and some chores are not getting done." With some planning and a simple opening like that, you can move into the next stage of negotiation.

There should be a high level of information exchange in the **exploration stage**. The overarching goal in this stage is to get a panoramic view of the conflict by sharing your perspective and listening to the other person. In this stage, you will likely learn how the other person is punctuating the conflict. Although you may have been mulling over the mess for a few days, your roommate may just now be aware of the conflict. She may also inform you that she usually cleans on Sundays but didn't get to last week because she unexpectedly had to visit her parents. The information that you gather here may clarify the situation enough to end the conflict and cease negotiation. If negotiation continues, the information will be key as you move into the bargaining stage.

The **bargaining stage** is where you make proposals and concessions. The proposal you make should be informed by what you learned in the exploration stage. Flexibility is important here, because you may have to revise your ideal outcome and bottom line based on new information. If your plan was to have a big cleaning day every Thursday, you may now want to propose to have the roommate clean on Sunday while you clean on Wednesday. You want to make sure your opening proposal is reasonable and not presented as an ultimatum. "I don't ever want to see a dish left in the sink" is different from "When dishes are left in the sink too long, they stink and get gross. Can we agree to not leave any dishes in the sink overnight?" Through the proposals you make, you could end up with a win/win situation. If there are areas of disagreement, however, you may have to make concessions or compromise, which can be a partial win or a partial loss. If you hate doing dishes but don't mind emptying the trash and recycling, you could propose to assign those chores based on preference. If you both hate doing dishes, you could propose to be responsible for washing your own dishes right after you use them. If you really hate dishes and have some extra money, you could propose to use disposable (and hopefully recyclable) dishes, cups, and utensils.

In the **settlement stage**, you want to decide on one of the proposals and then summarize the chosen proposal and any related concessions. It is possible that each party can have a different view of the agreed solution. If your roommate thinks you are cleaning the bathroom every other day and you plan to clean it on Wednesdays, then there could be future conflict. You could summarize and ask for confirmation by saying, "So, it looks like I'll be in charge of the trash and recycling, and you'll load and

unload the dishwasher. Then I'll do a general cleaning on Wednesdays and you'll do the same on Sundays. Is that right?" Last, you'll need to follow up on the solution to make sure it's working for both parties. If your roommate goes home again next Sunday and doesn't get around to cleaning, you may need to go back to the exploration or bargaining stage.

As with all the aspects of communication competence we have discussed so far, you cannot expect that everyone you interact with will have the same knowledge of communication that you have after reading this book. But it often only takes one person with conflict management skills to make an interaction more effective. Remember that it's not the quantity of conflict that determines a relationship's success; it's how the conflict is managed, and one person's competent response can deescalate a conflict. Competent communicators identify triggers and patterns, choose among styles (competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, collaborating) based on goals and stakes, and attend to cultural factors and face concerns that shape how messages land. They slow reactivity with information exchange, validate the other person to reduce defensiveness, and avoid pitfalls like one-upping and mindreading that escalate tension. Remember that interpersonal conflict is distinct from violence; effective management protects safety while preserving dignity.

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1. "Mediator on Best Career List for 2011," UNCG Program in Conflict and Peace Studies Blog, accessed November 5, 2012, http://conresuncg.blogspot.com/2011/04/mediator-on-best-career-list-for-2011.html. ↵

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6.4: The Dark Side of Relationships

In the course of a given day, it is likely that we will encounter the light and dark sides of interpersonal relationships. So 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

It’s important to start off this section by noting that lying doesn’t always constitute a “dark side” of relationships. Although many people have a negative connotation of lying, we have all lied or concealed information in order to protect the feelings of someone else. One research study found that only 27 percent of the participants agreed that a successful relationship must include complete honesty, which shows there is an understanding that lying is a communicative reality in all relationships (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Given this reality, it is important to understand the types of lies we tell and the motivations for and consequences of lying.

We tend to lie more during the initiating phase of a relationship (Knapp, 2006). At this time, people may lie about their personality, past relationships, income, or skill sets as they engage in impression management and try to project themselves as likable and competent. For example, while on a first date, a person may lie and say they recently won an award at work. People sometimes rationalize these lies by exaggerating something that actually happened. So perhaps this person did get recognized at work, but it wasn’t actually an award. Lying may be more frequent at this stage, too, because the two people don’t know each other, meaning it’s unlikely the other person would have any information that would contradict the statement or discover the lie. Aside from lying to make ourselves look better, we may also lie to make someone else feel better. Although trustworthiness and honesty have been listed by survey respondents as the most desired traits in a dating partner, total honesty in some situations could harm a relationship (Knapp, 2006). Altruistic lies are lies told to build the self-esteem of our relational partner, communicate loyalty, or bend the truth to spare someone from hurtful information. Part of altruistic lying is telling people what they want to hear. For example, you might tell a friend that his painting is really pretty when you don’t actually see the merit of it, or tell your mom you enjoyed her meatloaf when you really didn’t. These other-oriented lies may help maintain a smooth relationship, but they could also become so prevalent that the receiver of the lies develops a skewed self-concept and is later hurt. If your friend goes to art school only to be heavily critiqued, did your altruistic lie contribute to that?



Figure 6.4.1: Some lies are meant to protect someone or make someone feel better. Pamela Jackson – crossed fingers – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

As we grow closer to someone, we lie less frequently, and the way we go about lying also changes. In fact, it becomes more common to conceal information than to verbally deceive someone outright. We could conceal information by avoiding communication about subjects that could lead to exposure of the lie. When we are asked a direct question that could expose a lie, we may respond equivocally, meaning we don't really answer a question (Knapp, 2006). When we do engage in direct lying in our close relationships, there may be the need to tell supplemental lies to maintain the original lie. So what happens when we suspect or find out that someone is lying?

Research has found that we are a little better at detecting lies than random chance, with an average of about 54 percent detection (Knapp, 2006). In addition, couples who had been together for an average of four years were better at detecting lies in their partner than were friends they had recently made (Comadena, 1982). This shows that closeness can make us better lie detectors. But closeness can also lead some people to put the relationship above the need for the truth, meaning that a partner who suspects the other of lying might intentionally avoid a particular topic to avoid discovering a lie. Generally, people in close relationships also have a truth bias, meaning they think they know their relational partners and think positively of them, which predisposes them to believe their partner is telling the truth. Discovering lies can negatively affect both parties and the relationship as emotions are stirred up, feelings are hurt, trust and commitment are lessened, and perhaps revenge is sought.

Sexual and Emotional Cheating

Extradyadic romantic activity (ERA) includes sexual or emotional interaction with someone other than a primary romantic partner. Given that most romantic couples aim to have sexually exclusive relationships, ERA is commonly referred to as *cheating* or *infidelity* and viewed as destructive and wrong. Despite this common sentiment, ERA is not a rare occurrence. Comparing data from more than fifty research studies shows that about 30 percent of people report that they have cheated on a romantic partner, and there is good reason to assume that the actual number is higher than that (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007).

Although views of what is considered "cheating" vary among cultures and individual couples, sexual activity outside a primary partnership equates to cheating for most. Emotional infidelity is more of a gray area. While some individuals who are secure in their commitment to their partner may not be bothered by their partner's occasional flirting, others consider a double-glance by a partner at another attractive person a violation of the trust in the relationship. You only have to watch a few episodes of *The Jerry Springer Show* to see how actual or perceived infidelity can lead to jealousy, anger, and potentially violence. While research supports the general belief that infidelity leads to conflict, violence, and relational dissatisfaction, it also shows that there is a small percentage of relationships that are unaffected or improve following the discovery of infidelity (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). This again shows the complexity of the dark side of relationships.

The increase in technology and personal media has made extradyadic relationships somewhat easier to conceal, since smartphones and laptops can be taken anywhere and people can communicate to fulfill emotional and/or sexual desires. In some cases, this may only be to live out a fantasy and may not extend beyond electronic communication. But is sexual or emotional computer-mediated communication considered cheating? You may recall the case of former Congressman Anthony

Weiner, who resigned his position in the US House of Representatives after it was discovered that he was engaging in sexually explicit communication with people using Twitter, Facebook, and e-mail. The view of this type of communication as a dark side of relationships is evidenced by the pressure put on Weiner to resign.

Communication Aggression

Violence and abuse are a pervasive "dark side" of interpersonal relationships, with data showing widespread anger, rejection, bullying, stalking, and nearly two million workplace-violence victims annually (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; OSHA, 2011). Beyond physical harm, communication both contributes to and can help prevent interpersonal violence, which typically unfolds within ongoing relationships rather than as isolated incidents (Johnson, 2006). Intimate partner violence (IPV) includes three forms: intimate terrorism (a pattern of control through economic, emotional, and social isolation tactics, most often men against women); violent resistance (retaliatory violence, often women against abusive male partners); and situational couple violence (conflict-triggered aggression without a control motive), which is the most common. Domestic violence also encompasses child-to-parent, sibling, and elder abuse. Child abuse exceeds a million confirmed cases yearly (Morgan & Wilson, 2007) and often features harmful communication patterns: abusive parents misattribute mistakes as intentional, deliver global negative evaluations ("You can't do anything right"), discount successes with external attributions, and respond unpredictably—undermining children's self-esteem and promoting aggression. Reports of adolescent-to-parent abuse—often beginning between ages 10–14, more frequently targeting mothers and, when fathers, more often by sons—describe youths using verbal, emotional, and physical attacks to wear parents down rather than reacting to parental abuse (Eckstein, 2007). Recognizing these patterns clarifies how communication practices intersect with power, control, and safety across family and romantic contexts.



Figure 6.4.2: Aggression and even abuse directed from child to parent is becoming more of an issue. The Mighty Tim Inconnu – Aggre Children – CC BY 2.0.

While physical violence has great potential for causing injury or even death, psychological and emotional abuse can also be present in any relationship form. A surprising statistic states that almost all people have experienced at least one incident of psychological or verbal aggression from a current or past dating partner (Dailey, Lee, & Spitzberg, 2007). Psychological abuse is most often carried out through communicative aggression, which is recurring verbal or nonverbal communication that significantly and negatively affects a person's sense of self. The following are examples of communicative aggression (Dailey, Lee, & Spitzberg, 2007):

- Degrading (humiliating, blaming, berating, name-calling)
- Physically or emotionally withdrawing (giving someone the cold shoulder, neglecting)
- Restricting another person's actions (overmonitoring/controlling money or access to friends and family)
- Dominating (bossing around, controlling decisions)

- Threatening physical harm (threatening self, relational partner, or friends/family/pets of relational partner)

While incidents of communicative aggression might not reach the level of abuse found in an intimate terrorism situation, it is a pervasive form of abuse. Even though we may view physical or sexual abuse as the most harmful, research indicates that psychological abuse can be more damaging and have more wide-ranging and persistent effects than the other types of abuse (Dailey, Lee, & Spitzberg, 2007). Psychological abuse can lead to higher rates of depression, anxiety, stress, eating disorders, and attempts at suicide.

The discussion of the dark side of relationships shows us that communication can be hurtful on a variety of fronts. At the extreme, violence and communicative aggression—whether intimate terrorism, violent resistance, situational couple violence, child or adolescent abuse—illustrate how power, control, and harmful message patterns can erode safety, self-concept, and health. Still, the "dark side" of relationships is not a single place but a continuum shaped by two intersecting dimensions—social acceptability and relational functionality—and many behaviors resist neat labels. Practices often assumed to be positive (full openness, relentless pursuit of "understanding") can sometimes be maladaptive, while socially disapproved behaviors (like selective, altruistic deception) may preserve dignity or stability in specific contexts. Competent communicators respond by assessing intent, impact, and consent; monitoring patterns rather than isolated incidents; and prioritizing safety and resources when harm is present. As you move on, apply a both/and mindset: weigh societal norms and relational outcomes together, choose transparency or discretion with care, and intervene early in escalating patterns—because ethical, informed communication can prevent harm and, when needed, connect people to protection and repair.

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6.5: Chapter 6 Summary

Chapter 6 Review

What is Interpersonal Communication?

- The process of exchanging messages between people whose lives mutually influence one another, shaped by social and cultural norms.
- Not every exchange counts: brief, impersonal talk with a stranger usually isn't "interpersonal" unless there's meaningful, ongoing influence.

Why It Matters

- Survival and health: Social bonding aided human evolution; strong interpersonal skills correlate with better mental/physical health and less isolation.
- School, work, life: Employers prize communication; competent communicators balance being effective (achieving goals) and appropriate (respecting people/context).

How Interpersonal Communication Functions

- Instrumental goals: Getting things done (requesting help/info, offering support).
- Relational-maintenance goals: Keeping relationships strong (celebrations, regular check-ins, "define-the-relationship" talks).
- Self-presentation goals: Managing how others see us by adapting to roles and contexts.

Culture and Relationship "Micro-Cultures"

- Relationship cultures: Each relationship develops its own climate, routines, and rules, influenced by larger cultural norms.
- How we build them:
  - Storytelling: Old stories test fit; new shared stories build solidarity.
  - Personal idioms: Inside jokes/nicknames that signal belonging.
  - Routines and rituals: Predictable practices (weekly calls, dinner traditions) that create comfort and meaning.
  - Rules and norms: Explicit rules (we consult before big decisions) and implicit norms (no "shop talk" at happy hour).

Communicating in Relationships

- Self-disclosure: Sharing personal info others wouldn't know unless you tell them; increases in breadth and depth as trust grows; works best with reciprocity.
- Johari Window:
  - Arena (known to self/others), Blind spot (others know, you don't), Façade (you know, others don't), Unknown (no one knows yet).
- Relational dialectics (tensions we balance):
  - Autonomy–Connection, Novelty–Predictability, Openness–Closedness.
  - Management strategies: Neutralization (compromise), Separation (alternate), Segmentation (divide life spheres), Reframing (see tensions as supportive, not opposing).

Communication Climates

- Confirming climates make people feel valued; disconfirming climates do the opposite.
- Three confirming message types:
  - Recognition (you exist to me),

- Acknowledgement (I hear your thoughts/feelings),
- Endorsement (your feelings are valid, even if I disagree).

Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

- Definition: Interaction with perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints. Conflict is inevitable—and can be productive if well managed.
- Five conflict styles:
  - Competing (win/lose), Avoiding (delay/withdraw), Accommodating (yield), Compromising (each gives up something), Collaborating (win/win).
- Culture and face:
  - Individualist cultures often favor competing; collectivist cultures more often avoid or collaborate to protect harmony/"other-face."

Handling Conflict Better

- Common triggers: Criticism, demands, cumulative annoyance, rejection.
- Patterns to watch: Serial arguing (repeating, mutual hostility), pitfalls like one-upping and mindreading.
- Helpful moves: Validate, ask questions, listen actively, separate people from the problem, look for shared interests.

Basic Negotiation Steps

1. Prenegotiation: Signal a time to talk; clarify your goals (instrumental/relational/self-presentation).
2. Opening: Set a cooperative tone; use "we" language.
3. Exploration: Share perspectives; gather info.
4. Bargaining: Propose options; stay flexible; aim to collaborate.
5. Settlement: Summarize agreements; confirm next steps; follow up.

Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication

- Lying: Important to understand the types of lies we tell and the motivations for and consequences of lying.
- Sexual and Emotional Cheating: Increase in technology and personal media makes extradyadic relationships easier to conceal.
- Communication Aggression: Recurring verbal or nonverbal communication that significantly and negatively affects a person's sense of self.

Quick Self-Check

- Which goal are you prioritizing (instrumental, relational, self-presentation) in your next tough conversation?
- What's one confirming message (recognize, acknowledge, endorse) you can send today?
- Which conflict style do you default to—and when would collaborating serve you better?
- Do you experience or practice communication that would be considered on the dark side of the communication continuum?

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7: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

7.1: Foundations
7.2: Cultural Dimensions
7.3: Dialectical Approach
7.4: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities
7.5: Intercultural Communication Competence
7.6: Chapter 7 Summary

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7.1: Foundations

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. define the key components of intercultural communication competence and explain their importance in a globalized world.
2. apply Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's cultural variations to analyze real-world communication scenarios.
3. examine intercultural interactions through a dialectical "both/and" lens to navigate tensions between cultural patterns and individual variation.
4. assess how cultural identities are shaped through history and language and how this influences modern communication.
5. develop a personal strategy for communicating across difference that accounts for power dynamics and individual preferences for self-identification.

Humans have always been diverse in their cultural beliefs and practices. But as new technologies have led to the perception that our world has shrunk and demographic and political changes have brought attention to cultural differences, people communicate across cultures more now than ever before. The oceans and continents that separate us can now be traversed instantly with an email, phone call, tweet, or status update. Additionally, our workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods have become more integrated, increasing our interaction with domestic diversity. The disability rights movement and gay rights movement have increased the visibility of people with disabilities and sexual minorities. But just because we are exposed to more difference doesn't mean we understand it, can communicate across it, or appreciate it. This chapter will help you do all three.

Despite living in a diverse world, humans are naturally **egocentric**. Since we can exist only within our own heads, it is perfectly natural for us to *assume everyone else thinks, perceives, and communicates as we do*. The only world we can experience is the world as we see it, and it can be very challenging to understand that varied perceptions, values, and beliefs exist which are equally valid.

When communicating with people of different cultures, we want to be provisional communicators. **Provisionalism** is *the ability to accept the diversity of perceptions and beliefs, and to operate in a manner sensitive to that diversity*. Being provisional does not mean we abandon our own beliefs and values, nor does it mean we have to accept all beliefs and values as correct. Instead, provisionalism leads us to seek to understand variations in human behaviors, and to understand the field of experience out of which the other person operates. This adds an extra step to the interpretation process:

- We interpret the world within our own life experiences, *but then*
- We stop and consider, "How was the message intended?" or "What other factors may be motivating this behavior?"



Figure 7.1.1: Image 1

For example, in the dominant U.S. culture, we are taught it is rude to stare at people, especially those markedly different from ourselves. We consider such extended gazes unsettling, and we question why the person is doing it. This is not true, however, in all cultures. When one author of this section, Keith, was in China several years ago (Image 1), he had to acclimate to this cultural

difference. Since he stood out as markedly different; lighter skinned, bald, taller, and larger than the average Chinese, he would regularly catch people staring at him, and many were doing so quite openly and obviously. If he had simply used an egocentric interpretation, interpreting them according to his own culture, he would have drawn the conclusion they were very rude. Since Keith knew from various travel books of this cultural difference, he was able to be provisional and understand their behavior was perfectly appropriate within the context of their culture. If he had not learned about the culture, he might have experienced even greater **culture shock**. This term *refers to the discomfort felt when interacting in a new environment with few familiar cues to guide our communication behaviors* (Martin & Nakayama, 2018).

In addition to cultural differences, we also experience variations in communication behaviors between men and women. For example, Keith's wife and her sister can talk for hours about all sorts of relational issues with co-workers, with family members, and with friends while he finds such extensive conversations exhausting. Since female communication is far more focused on relationship development and maintenance, such conversations are consistent with the feminine communication style. The masculine style is far more focused on action and the bare details of events, who did what to whom, and not as focused on the nuances of relational dynamics. As someone who uses the masculine style, once Keith gets the basic details, he thinks he is informed and does not feel a need to dissect the smaller details of the event. Note that the masculine and feminine communication styles are not based on biology; men can use a feminine style and women can use a masculine style.

Culture and gender impact communication. As with all human behavior, when we address such variations, we always speak of tendencies, not absolutes: men *tend* to communicate one way, and women *tend* to communicate somewhat differently. Imagine if a visitor from another culture was to ask you, “What are Americans like?” Chances are you could identify a few characteristics but would also qualify your statements with, “But not everyone….”

Culture and Communication

Each of us exists within a dominant culture and is a member of several co-cultures. Culture is a complicated word to define, as there are at least six common ways that culture is used in the United States. For the purposes of exploring the communicative aspects of culture, we will define **culture** as the *ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors*. Unpacking the definition, we can see that culture shouldn’t be conceptualized as stable and unchanging. Culture is negotiated, and as we will learn later in this chapter, culture is dynamic, and cultural changes can be tracked and analyzed to better understand why our society is the way it is. The definition also points out that culture is learned, which accounts for the importance of socializing institutions like family, school, peers, and the media. Culture is patterned in that there are recognizable, widespread similarities among people within a cultural group. There is also a deviation from and resistance to those patterns by individuals and subgroups within a culture, which is why cultural patterns change over time. Last, the definition acknowledges that culture influences our beliefs about what is true and false, our attitudes including our likes and dislikes, our values regarding what is right and wrong, and our behaviors.

It is from these cultural influences that our identities are formed. For example, in U.S. culture, we place a high value on self-determination: we have a fundamental right to make choices we deem best for us. As long as our actions do not harm others or inhibit their choices, we feel free to follow the life path of our choosing. If others attempt to force us to act or think in certain ways, we tend to rebel. Other cultures are more collectivist, and the emphasis is placed on doing what is best for the group. In such cultures, engaging in individual behaviors that reflect poorly on the group is a powerful social taboo. For example, in some Asian cultures if a student performs poorly academically, it is seen as a reflection on the entire family, bringing shame to all. The pressures to succeed are based not on personal achievement but on maintaining the honor of the entire family. Contrast that to dominant U.S. culture, in which students are generally seen as failing or succeeding on their own merit.

Cultures do not have static sets of beliefs and values; instead they will evolve over time. In the U.S. we have seen large cultural shifts in the past 50 years. Sexual mores have changed quite dramatically, as have our attitudes about individual rights. While in the past women were restricted to a narrow range of careers, today we assume men and women are equally able to pursue the career of their choice. We continue to evolve attitudes toward minorities and immigrants. During the past 10 years, the changes in attitudes toward homosexuality and the civil rights of same-sex couples are quite striking.



Figure 7.1.2: Image 2

It is also important to note a broad culture, like the U.S., will also have a number of cultural groups within it, sometimes called **co-cultures**. This refers to *an identifiable group with their own unique traits operating within the larger culture*. In addition to culture and co-culture, others terms are used to refer to this aspect of cultures, such as majority and minority cultures or dominant and nondominant cultures or macro- and micro-cultures. These terms aim to reflect the importance of culture in the broader sense and the reality of the greater power some cultures hold within a society. Some groups within a larger culture relate to the social identities of those involved. These may be based on regions (the Old South, the East Coast, urban, rural), religion or beliefs (Catholics, Southern Baptists, Lutherans, Buddhists, Muslims, atheists), or affiliation (street gangs, NASCAR fans, college students). Such groups are not cultures per se but groups of people who share concerns and who might perceive similarities due to common interests or characteristics (Lustig & Koester, 2010).



Figure 7.1.3: Image 3

The way we communicate is influenced by our culture and co-cultures. Consider:

- The use of specific gestures, colors, and styles of dress in inner-city gangs;
- The classic Southern Accent;
- The use of regional sayings, such as “you betcha,” or “whatever” in rural Minnesota;
- The more observant nature of Indigenous Americans who may prefer to listen and observe.

These cultural groups and social identities operate within the larger culture while maintaining the traits that make them unique.

These variations in lifestyle, communication behaviors, values, beliefs, art, food, and such provide a rich quilt of human experience, and for the provisional communicator, one who can accept and appreciate these differences, it can be an invigorating experience to move among them. The first step is to examine the ways our own cultures have influenced our identities.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

How would you answer the question, "Who am I?" We develop a sense of who we are based on what is reflected back on us by other people. Our parents, friends, teachers, and the media help shape our identities. While this happens from birth, most people in Western societies reach a stage in adolescence where maturing cognitive abilities and increased social awareness lead them to begin to reflect on who they are. This begins a lifelong process of thinking about who we are now, who we were before, and who we will become (Tatum). Our identities make up an important part of our self-concept and can be broken down into three main categories: personal, social, and cultural identities (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Personal	Social	Cultural
Antique collector	Member of historical society	Irish American
Dog lover	Member of Humane Society	Male/female
Cyclist	Fraternity/sorority member	Greek American
Singer	High school music teacher	Multiracial
Shy	Book club member	Heterosexual
Athletic		Gay/lesbian

We must avoid the temptation to think of our identities as constant. Instead, our identities are formed through processes that started before we were born and will continue after we are gone; therefore, our identities aren't something we achieve or complete. Two related but distinct components of our identities are our personal and social identities (Spreckels and Kotthoff). Personal identities include the components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connected to our life experiences. For example, I consider myself a book lover, and you may identify as a fan of hip-hop music.

Our social identities are the components of self that are derived from involvement in social groups with which we are interpersonally committed. For example, we may derive aspects of our social identity from our family or from a community of fans for a sports team. Social identities differ from personal identities because they are externally organized through membership. Our membership may be voluntary (Greek organization on campus) or involuntary (family) and explicit (we pay dues to our labor union) or implicit (we purchase and listen to hip-hop music). There are innumerable options for personal and social identities. While our personal identity choices express who we are, our social identities align us with particular groups. Through our social identities, we make statements about who we are and who we are not.

Personal identities may change often as people have new experiences and develop new interests and hobbies. Current interest in online video games may give way to an interest in graphic design. Social identities do not change as often because they take more time to develop, as you must become interpersonally invested. For example, if an interest in online video games leads someone to become a member of a massively multiplayer online role-playing game community [MMORPG], that personal identity has led to a social identity that is now interpersonal and more entrenched.

Cultural identities are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting (Martin et al., 2002). Since we are often a part of them since birth, cultural identities are the least changeable of the three. The ways of being and the social expectations for behavior within cultural identities do change over time, but what separates them from most social identities is their historical roots (Collier, 1996). For example, think of how ways of being and acting have changed for Black Americans since the civil rights movement. Additionally, common ways of being and acting within a cultural identity group are expressed through communication. In order to be accepted as a member of a cultural group, members must be acculturated, essentially learning and using a code that other group members will be able to recognize. We are acculturated into our various cultural identities in obvious and less obvious ways. We may literally have a parent or friend tell us what it means to be a man or a woman. We may also unconsciously consume messages from popular culture that offer representations of gender.



Pledging a fraternity or sorority is an example of a social identity. Adaenn – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Any of these identity types can be ascribed or avowed. **Ascribed identities** are *personal, social, or cultural identities that are placed on us by others*, while **avowed identities** are *those that we claim for ourselves* (Martin and Nakayama). Sometimes people ascribe an identity to someone else based on stereotypes. You may see a person who likes to read science-fiction books, watches documentaries, has glasses, and collects Star Trek memorabilia and label that person as a nerd. If the person doesn't avow that identity, it can create friction, and that label may even hurt the other person's feelings. But ascribed and avowed identities can match up. To extend the previous example, there has been a movement in recent years to reclaim the label nerd and turn it into a positive, and a nerd subculture has been growing in popularity. For example, MC Frontalot, a leader in the nerdcore hip-hop movement, says that being branded a nerd in school was terrible, but now he raps about nerdy things like blogs to sold-out crowds (Shipman). We can see from this example that our ascribed and avowed identities change over the course of our lives, and sometimes they match up and sometimes they do not.

Although some identities are essentially permanent, the *degree to which we are aware of them*, also known as **salience**, changes. The intensity with which we avow an identity also changes based on context. For example, an African American may not have difficulty deciding which box to check in the demographic section of a survey. But if an African American becomes president of her college's Black Student Union, she may more intensely avow her African American identity, which has now become more salient. If she studies abroad in Africa during her junior year, she may be ascribed an identity of American by her new African friends rather than African American. For the Africans, their visitor's identity as American is likely more salient than her identity as someone of African descent. If someone is biracial or multiracial, they may change their racial identification as they engage in an identity search. One intercultural communication scholar writes of his experiences as an "Asianlatinoamerican" (Yep). He notes repressing his Chinese identity as an adolescent living in Peru and then later embracing his Chinese identity and learning about his family history while in college in the US. This example shows how even national identity fluctuates. Obviously, one can change nationality by becoming a citizen of another country, although most people do not. My identity as a US American became very salient for me for the first time in my life when I studied abroad in Sweden.

Throughout modern history, cultural and social influences have established dominant and nondominant groups (Allen). **Dominant identities** *historically had and currently have more resources and influence*, while **nondominant identities** *historically had and currently have fewer resources and influence*. It's important to remember that these distinctions are being made at the societal

level, not the individual level. There are obviously exceptions, with people in groups considered nondominant obtaining more resources and power than a person in a dominant group. However, the overall trend is that difference based on cultural groups has been institutionalized, and exceptions do not change this fact. Because of this uneven distribution of resources and power, members of dominant groups are granted privileges, while nondominant groups are at a disadvantage. The main nondominant groups must face various forms of institutionalized discrimination, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. As we will discuss later, privilege and disadvantage, like similarity and difference, are not all or nothing. No two people are completely different or completely similar, and no one person is completely privileged or completely disadvantaged.

Difference Matters

Whenever we encounter someone, we notice similarities and differences. While both are important, it is often the differences that are highlighted and contribute to communication troubles. We don't only see similarities and differences on an individual level. In fact, we also place people into in-groups and out-groups based on the similarities and differences we perceive. This is important because we then tend to react to someone we perceive as a member of an out-group based on the characteristics we attach to the group rather than the individual (Allen). In these situations, it is more likely that stereotypes and prejudice will influence our communication. Learning about difference and why it matters will help us be more competent communicators. The flip side of emphasizing difference is to claim that no differences exist and that you see everyone as a human being. Rather than trying to ignore difference and see each person as a unique individual, we should know the history of how differences came to be so socially and culturally significant and how they continue to affect us today.

Culture and identity are complex. You may be wondering how some groups came to be dominant and others nondominant. These differences are not natural, which can be seen as we unpack how various identities have changed over time in the next section. There is, however, a perspective that makes it seem natural and normal to many that some people or groups will always have power over others (Allen). In fact, hierarchy and domination, although prevalent throughout modern human history, were likely not the norm among early humans. So one of the first reasons difference matters is that people and groups are treated unequally, and a better understanding of how those differences came to be can help us create a more just society. Difference also matters because demographics and patterns of interaction are changing.

In the US, the population of people of color is increasing and diversifying, and visibility for people who are gay or lesbian and people with disabilities has also increased. The 2020 census shows that the Hispanic and Latino/a populations in the United States are now the second largest group in the country, having grown 23% since the last census in 2000 (census.gov). By 2030, racial and ethnic minorities will account for one-third of the population (Allen). Additionally, legal and social changes have created a more open environment for sexual minorities and people with disabilities. These changes directly affect our interpersonal relationships. The workplace is one context where changing demographics have become increasingly important. Many organizations are striving to comply with changing laws by implementing policies aimed at creating equal access and opportunity. Some organizations are going further than legal compliance to try to create inclusive climates where diversity is valued because of the interpersonal and economic benefits it has the potential to produce.

We can now see that difference matters due to the inequalities that exist among cultural groups and due to changing demographics that affect our personal and social relationships. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles that may impede our valuing of difference (Allen). Individuals with dominant identities may not validate the experiences of those in nondominant groups because they do not experience the oppression directed at those with nondominant identities. Further, they may find it difficult to acknowledge that not being aware of this oppression is due to the privilege associated with their dominant identities. Because of this lack of recognition of oppression, members of dominant groups may minimize, dismiss, or question the experiences of nondominant groups and view them as complainers or whiners.

Members of nondominant groups may have difficulty valuing difference due to negative experiences with the dominant group, such as not having their experiences validated. Both groups may be restrained from communicating about difference due to norms of political correctness, which may make people feel afraid to speak up because they may be perceived as insensitive or racist. All these obstacles are common, and they are valid. However, as we will learn later, developing intercultural communication competence can help us gain new perspectives, become more mindful of our communication, and intervene in some of these negative cycles.

It is through intercultural communication that we come to create, understand, and transform culture and identity. One reason we should study intercultural communication is to foster greater self-awareness (Martin and Nakayama). Our thought process regarding culture is often other-focused, meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage "know thyself" is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Intercultural communication can allow us to step outside of our comfortable,

usual frame of reference and see our culture through a different lens. Additionally, as we become more self-aware, we may also become more ethical communicators as we challenge our ethnocentrism, or our tendency to view our own culture as superior to other cultures. As was noted earlier, difference matters, and studying intercultural communication can help us better negotiate our changing world.

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7.2: Cultural Dimensions

Imagine stepping into a conversation where everyone follows invisible rules you don't know yet—what counts as "on time," how directly you should disagree, whether titles matter, or how much uncertainty people can tolerate. This section introduces you to two of the most widely used maps for navigating those hidden rules: Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's cultural variations. From power distance and uncertainty avoidance to monochronic vs. polychronic time and high- vs. low-context communication, you'll learn how cultures prioritize values, manage time, send messages, and set expectations. More than abstract theory, these lenses help you spot why misunderstandings happen, adapt your approach across settings (from classrooms to workplaces), and communicate with more curiosity, respect, and skill in our increasingly interconnected world.

Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture

Individualism and Collectivism

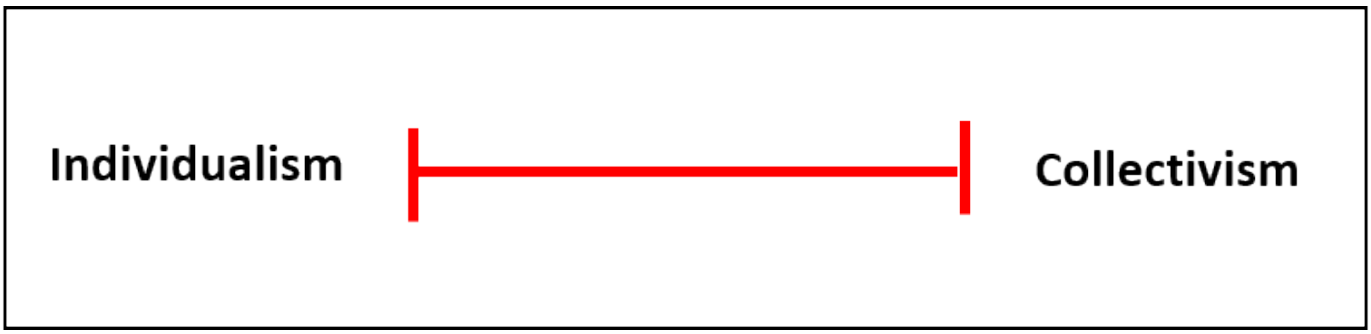


Figure 7.2.4: Image 4

According to Hofstede,

> The left side of this dimension, called **Individualism**, can be defined as *a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only*. Its opposite, **Collectivism**, represents *a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty*. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we" (Hofstede, 2012a).

In a highly individualistic culture, members are able to make choices based on personal preference with little regard for others, except for close family or significant relationships. They can pursue their own wants and needs free from concerns about meeting social expectations. The United States is a highly individualistic culture. While we value the role of certain aspects of collectivism such as government, social organizations, or other forms of collective action, at our core we strongly believe it is up to each person to find and follow their path in life.

In a highly collectivistic culture, just the opposite is true. It is the role of individuals to fulfill their place in the overall social order. Personal wants and needs are secondary to the needs of the society at large. There is immense pressure to adhere to social norms, and those who fail to conform risk social isolation, disconnection from family, and perhaps some form of banishment. China is typically considered a highly collectivistic culture. In China, multigenerational homes are common, and tradition calls for the oldest son to care for his parents as they age.

High Power-Distance and Low Power-Distance

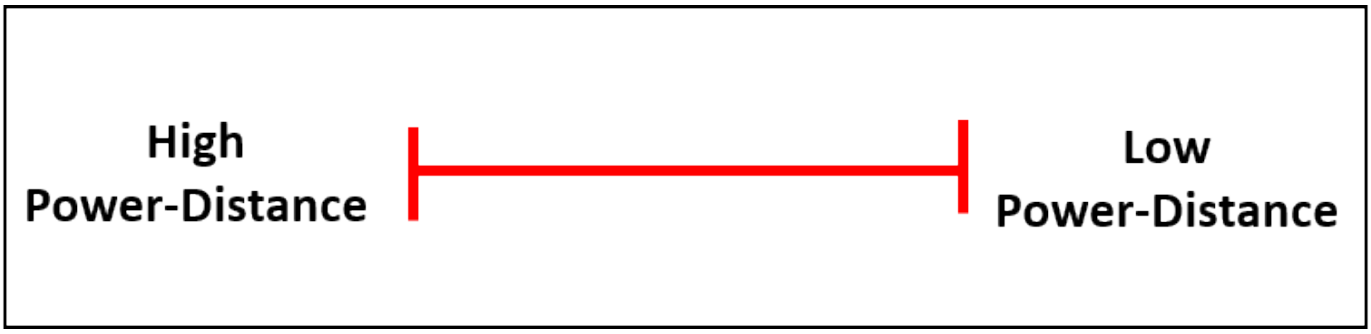


Figure 7.2.5: Image 5

Power is a normal feature of any relationship or society. How power is perceived, however, varies among cultures:

> The power distance dimension of culture expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect power to be distributed unequally. The fundamental issue is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a **large degree of power distance** *accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification*. In societies with **low power distance,** *people strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power* (Hofstede, 2012a).

In high power-distance cultures, the members accept some having more power and some having less power, and that this power distribution is natural and normal. Those with power are assumed to deserve it, and likewise those without power are assumed to be in their proper place. In such a culture, there will be a rigid adherence to the use of titles, "Sir," "Ma'am," "Officer," "Reverend," and so on. The directives of those with higher power are to be obeyed, with little question.

In low power-distance cultures, the distribution of power is considered far more arbitrary and viewed as a result of luck, money, heritage, or other external variables. For a person to be seen as having power, something must justify their power. A wealthy person is typically seen as more powerful in western cultures. Elected officials, like United States Senators, will be seen as powerful since they had to win their office by receiving majority support. In these cultures, individuals who attempt to assert power are often faced with those who stand up to them, question them, ignore them, or otherwise refuse to acknowledge their power. While some titles may be used, they will be used far less than in a high power-distance culture. For example, in colleges and universities in the U.S., it is far more common for students to address their instructors on a first-name basis, and engage in casual conversation on personal topics. In contrast, in a high power-distance culture like Japan, the students rise and bow as the teacher enters the room, address them formally at all times, and rarely engage in any personal conversation.

High Uncertainty Avoidance and Low Uncertainty Avoidance

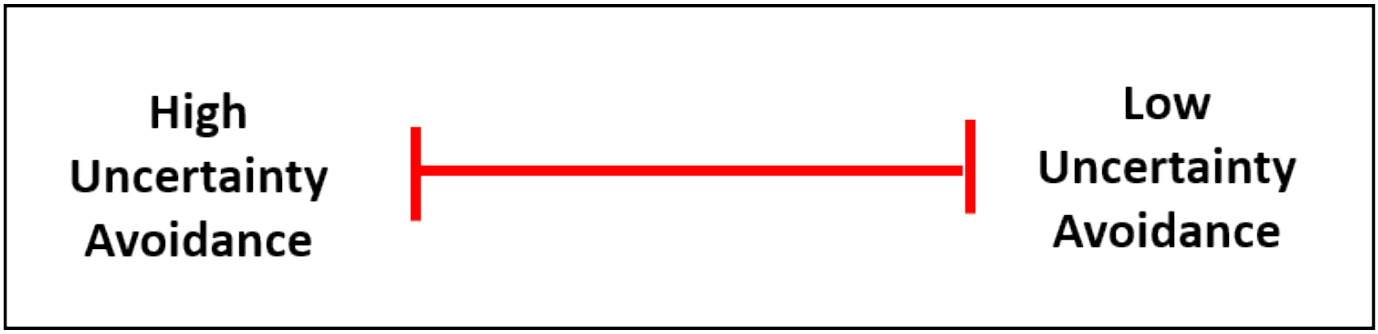


Figure 7.2.6: Image 6

As you have already learned in this course, humans do not like uncertainty, and the drive to lower uncertainty to increase predictability and comfort is quite strong. How cultures handle uncertainty varies:

> The uncertainty avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting **strong [uncertainty avoidance]** *maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas*. **Weak [uncertainty**

> **avoidance]** societies *maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles* (Hofstede, 2012a).

Consider how one avoids uncertainty: by limiting change, adhering to tradition, and sticking to past practice. High uncertainty avoidance cultures place a very high value on history, doing things as they have been done in the past, and honoring stable cultural norms. Even though the U.S. is generally low in uncertainty avoidance, we can see some evidence of a degree of higher uncertainty avoidance related to certain social issues. As society changes, there are many who will decry the changes as they are "forgetting the past," "dishonoring our forebears," or "abandoning sacred traditions." In the controversy over same-sex marriage, the phrase "traditional marriage" is used to refer to a two person, heterosexual marriage, suggesting same-sex marriage is a violation of tradition. Changing social norms creates uncertainty, and for many change is very unsettling.

In a low uncertainty avoidance culture, change is seen as inevitable, normal, and even preferable to stasis. In such a culture innovation in all areas is valued, whether it be in technology, business, social norms, or human relationship. Businesses in the U.S. that can change rapidly, innovate quickly, and respond immediately to market and social pressures are seen as far more successful. While Microsoft™ has long dominated the world market in computer operating systems, they are regularly criticized for being slow to change and to respond to changing consumer demands, which suggests a high uncertainty avoidance culture within that business. Apple™, on the other hand, has been praised for its innovation and ability to respond more quickly to market demands, suggesting a low uncertainty avoidance culture.

Long-Term Orientation and Short-Term Orientation

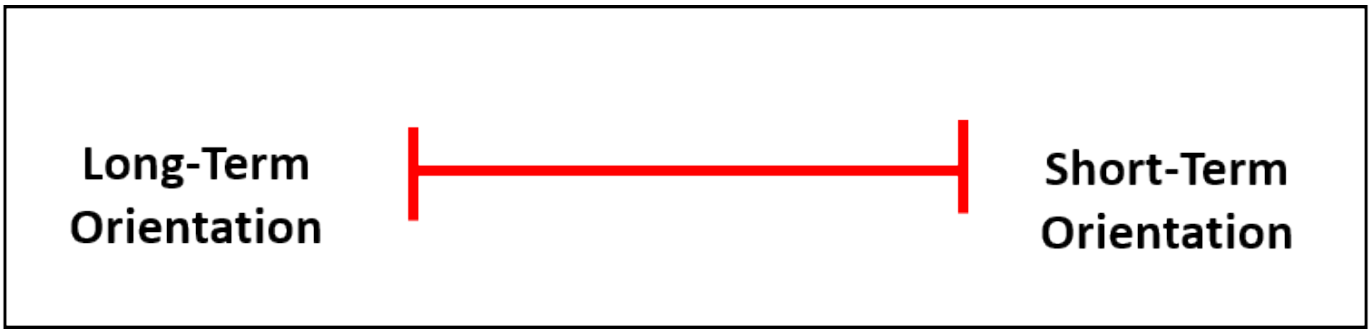


Figure 7.2.7: Image 7

People and cultures view time in different ways. For some, the "here and now" is paramount, and for others, "saving for a rainy day" is the dominant view.

> The **long-term orientation** dimension can be interpreted as *dealing with society's search for virtue*. Societies with a **short-term orientation** generally *have a strong concern with establishing the absolute Truth*. They are normative in their thinking. They exhibit great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results. In societies with a long-term orientation, people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time. They show an ability to adapt traditions to changed conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results (Hofstede, 2012a).

In a long-term culture, significant emphasis is placed on planning for the future. For example, the savings rates in France and Germany are 2-4 times greater than in the U.S., suggesting cultures with more of a "plan ahead" mentality (Pasquali & Aridas, 2012). These long-term cultures see change and social evolution as normal, integral parts of the human condition.
In a short-term culture, emphasis is placed far more on the "here and now." Immediate needs and desires are paramount, with longer-term issues left for another day. The U.S. falls more into this type. Legislation tends to be passed to handle immediate problems, and it can be challenging for lawmakers to convince voters of the need to look at issues from a long-term perspective. With the fairly easy access to credit, consumers are encouraged to buy now versus waiting. We see evidence of the need to establish "absolute Truth" in our political arena on issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and gun control. Our culture does not tend to favor middle grounds in which truth is not clear-cut.

Masculine and Feminine

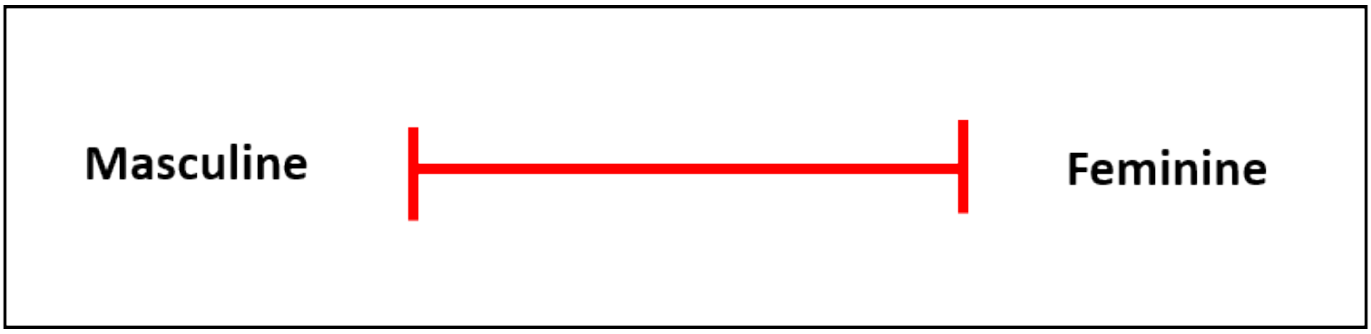


Figure 7.2.8: Image 8

Expectations for gender roles are a core component of any culture. All cultures have some sense of what it means to be a "man" or a "woman." **Masculine cultures** are *traditionally seen as more aggressive and domineering*, while **feminine cultures** are *traditionally seen as more nurturing and caring*. Hofstede (2012a) states:

> The masculinity side of this dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success. Society at large is more competitive. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented.

In a masculine culture, such as the U.S., winning is highly valued. We respect and honor those who demonstrate power and high degrees of competence. Consider the role of competitive sports such as football, basketball, or baseball, and how the rituals of identifying the best are significant events. The 2017 Super Bowl had 111 million viewers, (Huddleston, 2017) and the World Series regularly receives high ratings, with the final game in 2016 ending at the highest rating in ten years (Perez, 2016).

More feminine societies, such as those in the Scandinavian countries, will certainly have their sporting moments. However, the culture is far more structured to provide aid and support to citizens, focusing their energies on providing a reasonable quality of life for all (Hofstede, 2012b).

Indulgence and Restraint

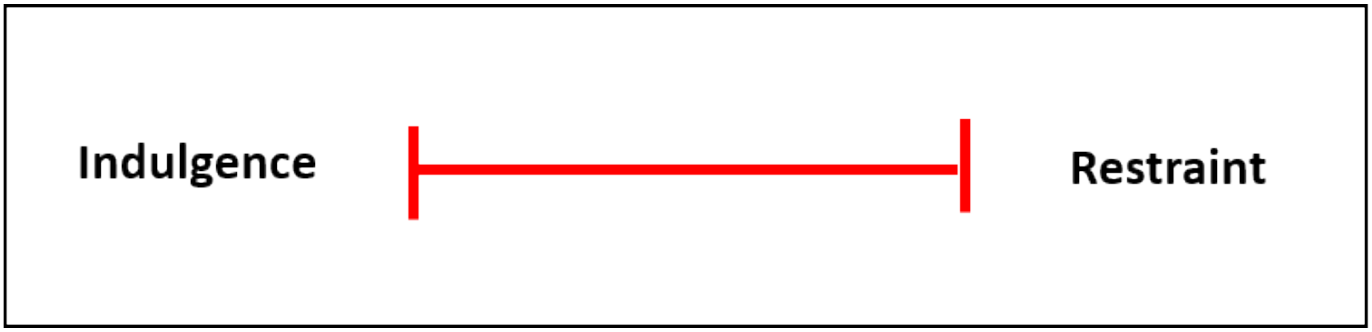


Figure 7.2.9: Image 9

A more recent addition to Hofstede's dimensions of culture, the indulgence/restraint continuum addresses the degree of rigidity of social norms of behavior. He states:

> **Indulgence** *stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun*. **Restraint** *stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms* (Hofstede, 2012a).

Indulgent cultures are comfortable with individuals acting on their more basic human drives. Sexual mores are less restrictive, and one can act more spontaneously than in cultures of restraint. Those in indulgent cultures will tend to communicate fewer messages of judgment and evaluation. Every spring thousands of U.S. college students flock to places like Cancun, Mexico, to engage in a week of fairly indulgent behavior. Feeling free from the social expectations of home, many will engage in some intense partying, sexual activity, and fairly limitless behaviors.

Cultures of restraint, such as many Islamic countries, have rigid social expectations of behavior that can be quite narrow. Guidelines on dress, food, drink, and behaviors are rigid and may even be formalized in law. In the U.S., a generally indulgent culture, there are sub-cultures that are more restraint focused. The Amish are highly restrained by social norms, but so too can be inner-city gangs. Areas of the country, like Utah with its large Mormon culture, or the Deep South with its large evangelical Christian culture, are more restrained than areas such as San Francisco or New York City. Rural areas often have more rigid social norms than do urban areas. Those in more restraint-oriented cultures will identify those not adhering to these norms, placing pressure on them, either openly or subtly, to conform to social expectations.

Hall's Cultural Variations

In addition to these six dimensions from Hofstede, anthropologist Edward T. Hall identified two more significant cultural variations (Raimo, 2008).

Monochronic and Polychronic

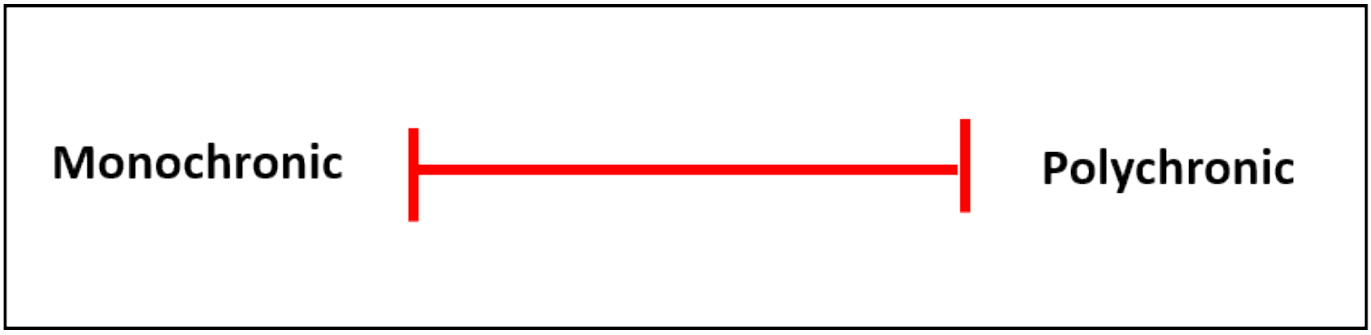


Figure 7.2.10: Image 10

Another aspect of **variations in time orientation** is the difference between monochronic and polychronic cultures. This refers to *how people perceive and value time*.

In a **monochronic culture**, like the U.S., *time is viewed as linear, as a sequential set of finite time units*. These units are a commodity, much like money, to be managed and used wisely; once the time is gone, it is gone and cannot be retrieved. Consider the language we use to refer to time: *spending* time; *saving* time; *budgeting* time; *making* time. These are the same terms and concepts we apply to money; time is a resource to be managed thoughtfully. Since we value time so highly, that means we value punctuality, scheduling, and being busy.

In a **polychronic culture**, like Spain, *time is far, far more fluid*. Schedules are more like rough outlines to be followed, altered, or ignored as events warrant. Relationship development is more important, and schedules do not drive activity. Multi-tasking is far more acceptable, as one can move between various tasks as demands change. In polychronic cultures, people make appointments, but there is more latitude for when they are expected to arrive. David's appointment may be at 10:15, but as long as he arrives sometime within the 10 o'clock hour, he is on time.

Consider a monochronic person attempting to do business in a polychronic culture. The monochronic person may expect meetings to start promptly on time, stay focused, and for work to be completed in a regimented manner to meet an established deadline. Yet those in a polychronic culture will not bring those same expectations to the encounter, sowing the seeds for some significant intercultural conflict.

High Context and Low Context

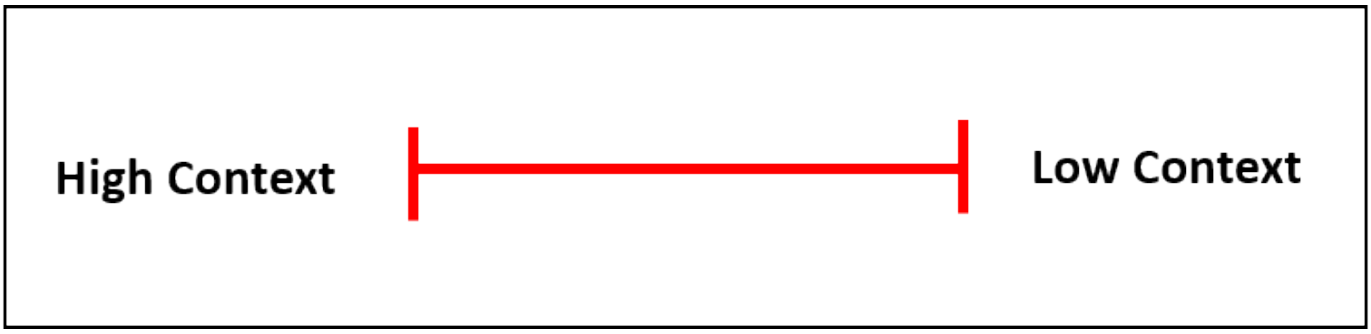


Figure 7.2.11: Image 11

The last variation in culture to consider is whether the culture is high context or low context.

In **low-context cultures**, *verbal communication is given primary attention*. The assumption is that people will say what they mean relatively directly and clearly. Little will be left for the receiver to interpret or imply. In the U.S. if someone does not want something, we expect them to say, "No." While we certainly use nonverbal communication variables to get a richer sense of the meaning of the person's message, we consider what they say to be the core, primary message. Those in a high-context culture find the directness of low-context cultures quite disconcerting, to the point of rudeness.

In **high-context cultures**, *nonverbal communication is as important, if not more important, than verbal communication*. How something is said is a significant variable in interpreting what is meant. Messages are often implied and delivered quite subtly. Japan is well known for the reluctance of people to use blunt messages, so they have far more subtle ways to indicate disagreement than a low-context culture. Those in low context cultures find these subtle, implied messages frustrating.

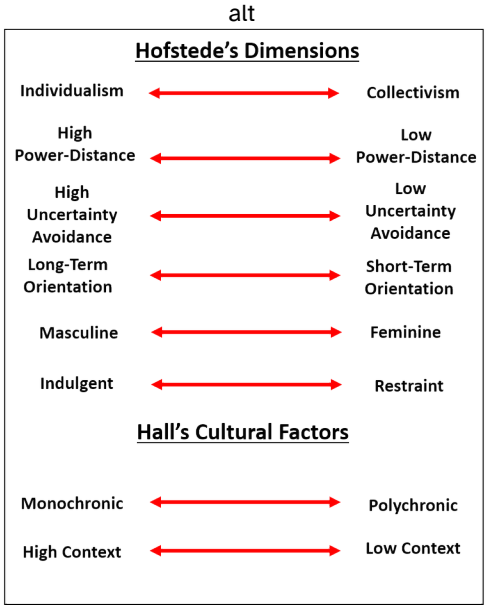


Figure 7.2.12: Image 12

In summary, Hofstede's Dimensions and Hall's Cultural Variations give us some tools to use to identify, categorize, and discuss diversity in communication. As we learn to see these differences, we are better equipped to manage intercultural encounters, communicate more provisionally, and adapt to cultural variations. While intended to show only broad cultural differences, these eight variables can also be useful tools to identify variations among individuals within a given culture. We can use them to identify sources of conflict or tension within a given relationship and improve our communication as a result. For example, Keith tends to be a short-term oriented, indulgent, monochronic person, while his wife tends be long-term oriented, restrained, and more polychronic. Needless to say, they frequently experience their own personal "culture clashes."

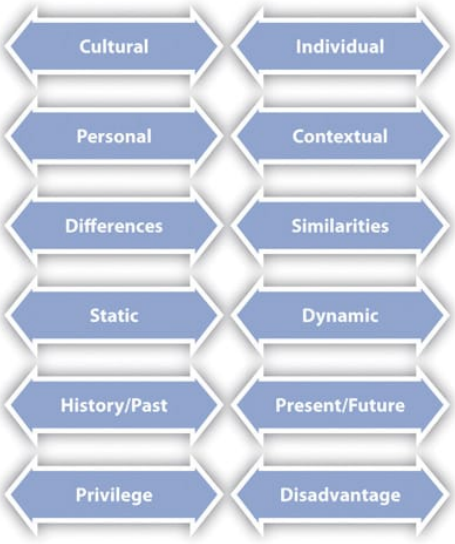
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7.3: Dialectical Approach

Intercultural communication is complicated, messy, and at times, contradictory. Therefore, it is not always easy to conceptualize or study. Taking a dialectical approach allows us to capture the dynamism of intercultural communication. A **dialectic** is a *relationship between two opposing concepts that constantly push and pull one another* (Martin and Nakayama). To put it another way, thinking dialectically helps us realize that our experiences often occur in between two different phenomena. This perspective is beneficial for interpersonal and intercultural communication because when we think dialectically, we think relationally. This means we look at the relationship between aspects of intercultural communication rather than viewing them in isolation. Intercultural communication occurs as a dynamic in-betweenness that, while connected to the individuals in an encounter, goes beyond the individuals, creating something unique. Holding a dialectical perspective may be challenging for some Westerners, as it asks us to hold two contradictory ideas simultaneously, which goes against much of what we are taught in our formal education.

Thinking dialectically helps us see the complexity of culture and identity because it doesn't allow for dichotomies. Dichotomies are dualistic ways of thinking that highlight opposites, reducing the ability to see gradations that exist in between concepts. Dichotomies such as good/evil, wrong/right, objective/subjective, male/female, in-group/out-group, black/white, and so on form the basis of much of our thoughts on ethics, culture, and general philosophy, but this isn't the only way of thinking (Martin and Nakayama). Many Eastern cultures acknowledge that the world isn't dualistic. Rather, they accept as part of their reality that things that seem opposite are actually interdependent and complement each other. I argue that a dialectical approach is useful in studying intercultural communication because it gets us out of our comfortable and familiar ways of thinking. Since so much of understanding culture and identity is understanding ourselves, having an unfamiliar lens through which to view culture can offer us insights that our familiar lenses will not. Specifically, we can better understand intercultural communication by examining six dialectics (see Figure 1.1) (Martin and Nakayama).



Dialectics of Intercultural Communication. Image by Martin and Nakayama.

Cultural-Individual

The **cultural-individual dialectic** captures the *interplay between patterned behaviors learned from a cultural group and individual behaviors that may be variations on or counter to those of the larger culture*. This dialectic is useful because it helps us account for exceptions to cultural norms. For example, earlier we learned that the US is said to be a low-context culture, which means that we value verbal communication as our primary form of communication. Conversely, Japan is said to be a high-context culture, which means they often look for nonverbal clues like tone, silence, or what is not said for meaning. However, you can find people in the US who intentionally put much meaning into how they say things, perhaps because they are not as comfortable speaking directly about what's on their minds. We often do this in situations when we may hurt someone's feelings or damage a relationship. Does that mean we come from a high-context culture? Does the Japanese man who speaks more than is socially acceptable come from a low-context culture? The answer to both questions is no. Neither the behaviors of a small percentage of

individuals nor occasional situational choices constitute a cultural pattern.

Personal-Contextual

The personal-contextual dialectic highlights the connection between our personal patterns of and preferences for communicating and how various contexts influence the personal. In some cases, our communication patterns and preferences will stay the same across many contexts. In other cases, a context shift may lead us to alter our communication and adapt. For example, an American businesswoman may prefer to communicate with her employees in an informal and laid-back manner. When she is promoted to manage a department in her company's office in Malaysia, she may again prefer to communicate with her new Malaysian employees the same way she did with those in the US. In the US, we know that there are some accepted norms that communication in work contexts is more formal than in personal contexts. However, we also know that individual managers often adapt these expectations to suit their own personal tastes. This type of managerial discretion would likely not go over as well in Malaysia, where there is a greater emphasis put on power distance (Hofstede). So while the American manager may not know to adapt to the new context unless she has a high degree of intercultural communication competence, Malaysian managers would realize that this is an instance when the context likely influences communication more than personal preferences.

Differences-Similarities

The **differences-similarities dialectic** allows us to examine how *we are simultaneously similar to and different from others*. As was noted earlier, it's easy to fall into a view of intercultural communication as other-oriented and set up dichotomies between us and them. When we overly focus on differences, we can end up polarizing groups that actually have things in common. When we overly focus on similarities, we essentialize or reduce and overlook important variations within a group. This tendency is evident in most of the popular, and some academic, conversations regarding gender differences. The book *Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus* makes it seem like men and women aren't even species that hail from the same planet. The media is quick to include a blurb from a research study indicating again how men and women are wired to communicate differently. However, the overwhelming majority of current research on gender and communication finds that while there are differences between how men and women communicate, there are far more similarities (Allen). Even the language we use to describe the genders sets up dichotomies. That's why I suggest that my students use the term "other gender" instead of the commonly used "opposite sex." I have a mom, a sister, and plenty of female friends, and I don't feel like any of them are the opposite of me. Perhaps a better title for a book would be *Women and Men Are Both from Earth*.

Static-Dynamic

The **static-dynamic dialectic** suggests that *culture and communication change over time yet often appear to be and are experienced as stable*. Although our cultural beliefs and practices are indeed rooted in the past, we have already discussed how cultural categories that most of us assume to be stable, like race and gender, have changed dramatically in just the past fifty years. Some cultural values remain relatively consistent over time, which allows us to make some generalizations about a culture. For example, cultures have different orientations to time. The Chinese have a longer-term orientation to time than do Europeans (Lustig and Koester). This is evidenced in something that dates back as far as astrology. The Chinese zodiac is done annually (the Year of the Monkey, etc.), while European astrology was organized by month (Taurus, etc.). While this cultural orientation to time has been around for generations, as China becomes more westernized in terms of technology, business, and commerce, it could also adopt some views on time that are more short term.

Past-Future

The **history/past-present/future dialectic** reminds us *that while current cultural conditions are important and that our actions now will inevitably affect our future, those conditions are not without a history*. We always view history through the lens of the present. Perhaps no example is more entrenched in our past and avoided in our present than the history of slavery in the United States. Where one author of this section grew up in the southern US, race was something that came up frequently. The high school he attended was 30% minorities (mostly Black American) and also had a noticeable number of white teens (mostly male) who proudly displayed Confederate flags on their clothing or vehicles. He remembers an instance in a history class when we were discussing slavery and the subject of reparations, or compensation for descendants of slaves, came up. A white male student in the class proclaimed, "I've never owned slaves. Why should I have to care about this now?" While his statement about not owning slaves is valid, it doesn't acknowledge that the effects of slavery still linger today and that the repercussions of such a long and unjust period of our history don't disappear after a few generations.

Privileges-Disadvantages

The **privileges-disadvantages dialectic** captures the *complex interrelation of unearned, systemic advantages and disadvantages that operate among our various identities*. As was discussed earlier, our society consists of dominant and nondominant groups. Our cultures and identities have certain privileges and/or disadvantages. To understand this dialectic, we must view culture and identity through a lens of intersectionality, which asks us to acknowledge that we each have multiple cultures and identities that intersect with each other. Because our identities are complex, no one is completely privileged, and no one is completely disadvantaged. For example, while we may think of a white, heterosexual male as being very privileged, he may also have a disability that leaves him without the able-bodied privilege that a Latina woman has. This is often a difficult dialectic for my students to understand because they are quick to point out exceptions that they think challenge this notion. When we view privilege and disadvantage at the cultural level, we cannot let individual exceptions distract from the systemic and institutionalized ways in which some people in our society are disadvantaged while others are privileged.

As these dialectics reiterate, culture and communication are complex systems that intersect with and diverge from many contexts. A better understanding of all these dialectics helps us be more critical thinkers and competent communicators in a changing world. It offers a powerful lens for navigating the "messy" and often contradictory nature of intercultural communication. By moving beyond simple dichotomies—like us vs. them or individual vs. culture—we can embrace a more relational and dynamic "in-betweenness." Whether we are balancing personal preferences with contextual demands, recognizing the interplay of privilege and disadvantage through intersectionality, or understanding how the past informs our present, these six dialectics challenge us to think more deeply. Ultimately, this approach encourages us to move past stereotypes and rigid categories, fostering the curiosity and flexibility needed to communicate effectively in our complex, interconnected world.

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7.4: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

We can get a better understanding of current cultural identities by unpacking how they came to be. By looking at history, we can see how cultural identities that seem to have existed forever actually came to be constructed for various political and social reasons and how they have changed over time. Communication plays a central role in this construction. As we have already discussed, our identities are relational and communicative; they are also constructed. **Social constructionism** is a *view that argues the self is formed through our interactions with others and in social, cultural, and political contexts* (Allen). In this section, we'll explore how the cultural identities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability have been constructed in the United States and how communication relates to those identities. Other important identities could be discussed, like religion, age, nationality, and class. Although they are not given their own section, consider how those identities may intersect with the identities discussed next.

Race

Would it surprise you to know that human beings, regardless of how they are racially classified, share 99.9% of their DNA? This finding by the Human Genome Project asserts that race is a social construct, not a biological one. The American Anthropological Association agrees, stating that race is the product of "historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances" (Allen). Therefore, we'll define race as a socially constructed category based on differences in appearance that have been used to create hierarchies that privilege some and disadvantage others.



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Race didn't become a socially and culturally recognized marker until European colonial expansion in the 1500s. As Western Europeans traveled to parts of the world previously unknown to them and encountered people who were different from them, a hierarchy of races began to develop that placed lighter-skinned Europeans above darker-skinned people. At the time, newly developing fields in natural and biological sciences took interest in examining the new locales, including plant and animal life, natural resources, and native populations. Over the next three hundred years, science that we would now undoubtedly recognize as flawed, biased, and racist legitimated notions that native populations were less evolved than white Europeans, often calling them savages. In fact, there were scientific debates as to whether some of the native populations should be considered human or animal. Racial distinctions have been based largely on phenotypes, or physiological features such as skin color, hair texture, and body/facial features. Unsophisticated Western scientists used these differences as unsubstantiated proof that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales (Allen). Even though there is a consensus among experts that race is social rather than biological, we can't deny that race still has meaning in our society and affects people as if it were real.

Given that race is one of the first things we notice about someone, it's important to know how race and communication relate

(Allen). Discussing race in the United States is difficult for many reasons. One is due to uncertainty about language use. People may be frustrated by their perception that labels change too often or be afraid of using an improper term and being viewed as racially insensitive. It is important, however, that we not let political correctness get in the way of meaningful dialogues and learning opportunities related to difference. Learning some of the communicative histories of race can make us more competent communicators and open us up to more learning experiences.

Racial classifications used by the government and our regular communication about race in the US have changed frequently, which further points to the social construction of race. Currently, the primary racial groups in the United States are African American, Asian American, European American, Latino/a, and Native American, but a brief look at changes in how the US Census Bureau has defined race clearly shows that this hasn't always been the case (see Table 1.2). In the 1900s alone, there were twenty-six different ways that race was categorized on census forms (Allen). The way we communicate about race in our regular interactions has also changed, and many people are still hesitant to discuss race for fear of using the wrong vocabulary.

The five primary racial groups noted previously can still be broken down further to specify a particular region, country, or nation. For example, Asian Americans are diverse in terms of country and language of origin and cultural practices. While the category of Asian Americans can be useful when discussing broad trends, it can also generalize among groups, which can lead to stereotypes. You may find that someone identifies as Chinese American or Korean American instead of Asian American. In this case, the label further highlights a person's cultural lineage. We should not assume, however, that someone identifies with his or her cultural lineage, as many people have more in common with their US American peers than a culture that may be one or more generations removed.

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an N for negro. Later she referred to herself as colored because that's what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term black had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word black, and the slogan "black is beautiful" was commonly used. Allen acknowledges the newer label of African American but notes that she still prefers black. The terms colored and negro are no longer considered appropriate because they were commonly used during a time when black people were blatantly discriminated against. Even though that history may seem far removed to some, it is not to others. Currently, the terms African American and black are frequently used, and both are considered acceptable. The phrase people of color is acceptable for most and is used to be inclusive of other racial minorities. If you are unsure what to use, you could always observe how a person refers to himself or herself, or you could ask for his or her preference. In any case, a competent communicator defers to and respects the preference of the individual.

The label Latin American generally refers to people who live in Central American countries. Although Spain colonized much of what is now South and Central America and parts of the Caribbean, the inhabitants of these areas are now much more diverse. Depending on the region or country, some people primarily trace their lineage to the indigenous people who lived in these areas before colonization, to a Spanish and indigenous lineage, or to other combinations that may include European, African, and/or indigenous heritage. Latina and Latino are labels that are preferable to Hispanic for many who live in the United States and trace their lineage to South and/or Central America and/or parts of the Caribbean. Scholars who study Latina/o identity often use the label Latina/o in their writing to acknowledge women who avow that identity label (Calafell). In verbal communication, you might say "Latina" when referring to a particular female or "Latino" when referring to a particular male of Latin American heritage. When referring to the group as a whole, you could say "Latinas and Latinos" or "Latinx" instead of just "Latinos," which would be more gender inclusive. While Hispanic is used by the US Census, it refers primarily to people of Spanish origin, which doesn't account for the diversity of background of many Latinos/as. The term Hispanic also highlights the colonizer's influence over the indigenous, which erases a history that is important to many. Additionally, some people claim Spanish origins and identify culturally as Hispanic but racially as white. Labels such as Puerto Rican or Mexican American, which further specify region or country of origin, may also be used. Just as with other cultural groups, if you are unsure of how to refer to someone, you can always ask for and honor someone's preference.

TABLE 1.2 Racial Classifications in the US Census

Year(s)	Development
1790	No category for race

1800	Race is defined by the percentage of African blood. Mulatto was one black and one white parent, quadroon was one-quarter African blood, and octoroon was one-eighth.
1830–1940	The term color was used instead of race.
1900	Racial categories included white, black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Census takers were required to check one of these boxes based on visual cues. Individuals did not get to select a racial classification on their own until 1970.
1950	The term color was dropped and replaced by race.
1960–70	Both race and color were used on census forms.
1980–2010	Race again became the only term.
2000	Individuals were allowed to choose more than one racial category for the first time in census history.
2010	The census included fifteen racial categories and an option to write in races not listed on the form.
2020	Individuals who identified as white, black / African American, and/or American Indian or Alaska Native were asked to specifically identify their racial origins.

The history of immigration in the US is also tied to the way that race has been constructed. The metaphor of the melting pot has been used to describe the immigration history of the US but doesn't capture the experiences of many immigrant groups (Allen). Generally, immigrant groups who were white, or light skinned, and spoke English were better able to assimilate or melt into the melting pot. But immigrant groups that we might think of as white today were not always considered so. Irish immigrants were discriminated against and even portrayed as black in cartoons that appeared in newspapers. In some southern states, Italian immigrants were forced to go to black schools, and it wasn't until 1952 that Asian immigrants were allowed to become citizens of the US. All this history is important because it continues to influence communication among races today.

Interracial Communication

Race and communication are related in various ways. Racism influences our communication about race and is not an easy topic for most people to discuss. Today, people tend to view racism as overt acts such as calling someone a derogatory name or discriminating against someone in thought or action. However, there is a difference between racist acts, which we can attach to an individual, and institutional racism, which is not as easily identifiable. It is much easier for people to recognize and decry racist actions than it is to realize that racist patterns and practices go through societal institutions, which means that racism exists and doesn't have to be committed by any one person. As competent communicators and critical thinkers, we must challenge ourselves to be aware of how racism influences our communication at individual and societal levels.

We tend to make assumptions about people's race based on how they talk, and often these assumptions are based on stereotypes.

Dominant groups tend to define what is correct or incorrect usage of a language, and since language is so closely tied to identity, labeling a group's use of a language as incorrect or deviant challenges or negates part of their identity (Yancy). We know there isn't only one way to speak English, but there have been movements to identify a standard. This becomes problematic when we realize that standard English refers to a way of speaking English that is based on white, middle-class ideals that do not match up with the experiences of many. When we create a standard for English, we can label anything that deviates from that as nonstandard English. Differences between standard English and what has been called "Black English" or "African American English" have gotten national attention through debates about whether or not instruction in classrooms should accommodate students who do not speak standard English. Education plays an important role in language acquisition, and class relates to access to education. In general, whether someone speaks standard English themselves or not, they tend to negatively judge people whose speech deviates from the standard.

The "English only" movement of recent years is largely a backlash targeted at immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. Another national controversy has revolved around the inclusion of Spanish in common language use, such as Spanish as an option at ATMs or other automated services, and Spanish-language instruction in school for students who don't speak or are learning to speak English. As was noted earlier, the Latino/a population in the United States is growing fast, which has necessitated the inclusion of Spanish in many areas of public life. This has also created a backlash, which some scholars argue is tied more to the race of the immigrants than the language they speak and fear that white America could be engulfed by other languages and cultures (Speicher). This backlash has led to a revived movement to make English the official language of the US.



Welcome to America, indeed by CGP Grey is used under CC BY 2.0.

The US Constitution does not stipulate a national language, and Congress has not designated one either. While nearly thirty states have passed English-language legislation, it has mostly been symbolic, and court rulings have limited any enforceability (Zuckerman). The Linguistic Society of America points out that immigrants are very aware of the social and economic advantages of learning English and do not need to be forced. They also point out that the US has always had many languages represented, that national unity hasn't rested on a single language, and that there are benefits to having a multilingual population. Interracial communication presents some additional verbal challenges.

Code-switching involves changing from one way of speaking to another between or within interactions. Some people of color may engage in code-switching when communicating with dominant group members because they fear they will be negatively judged. Adopting the language practices of the dominant group may minimize perceived differences. This code-switching creates a linguistic dual consciousness in which people can maintain their linguistic identities with their in-group peers but can still acquire tools and gain access needed to function in a dominant society (Yancy). White people may also feel anxious about communicating with people of color out of fear of being perceived as racist. In other situations, people in dominant groups may spotlight nondominant members by asking them to comment on or educate others about their race (Allen). For example, I once taught at a private university that was predominantly white. Students of color talked to me about being asked by professors to weigh in on an issue when discussions of race came up in the classroom. While a professor may have been well intentioned, spotlighting can make a student feel conspicuous, frustrated, or defensive. Additionally, I bet the professors wouldn't think about asking a white, male, or heterosexual student to give the perspective of their whole group.

Gender

When we first meet a newborn baby, we ask whether it's a boy or a girl. This question illustrates the importance of gender in organizing our social lives and our interpersonal relationships. A Canadian family became aware of the deep emotions people feel about gender and the great discomfort people feel when they can't determine gender when they announced to the world that they were not going to tell anyone the gender of their baby, aside from the baby's siblings. Their desire for their child, named Storm, to be able to experience early life without the boundaries and categories of gender brought criticism from many (Davis and James). Conversely, many parents consciously or unconsciously code their newborns in gendered ways based on our society's associations of pink clothing and accessories with girls and blue with boys. While it's obvious to most people that colors aren't gendered, they take on new meaning when we assign gendered characteristics of masculinity and femininity to them. Just like race, gender is a socially constructed category. While it is true that there are biological differences between who we label male and female, the meaning our society places on those differences is what actually matters in our day-to-day lives. And the biological differences are interpreted differently around the world, which further shows that although we think gender is a natural, normal, stable way of classifying things, it is actually not. There is a long history of appreciation for people who cross gender lines in Native American and South Central Asian cultures, to name just two.

You may have noticed I use the word gender instead of sex. That's because **gender** is *an identity based on internalized cultural notions of masculinity and femininity that are constructed through communication and interaction*. There are two important parts of this definition to unpack. First, we internalize notions of gender based on socializing institutions, which helps us form our gender identity. Then we attempt to construct that gendered identity through our interactions with others, which is our gender expression. **Sex** is *based on biological characteristics, including external genitalia, internal sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones* (Wood). While the biological characteristics between men and women are obviously different, it's the meaning that we create and attach to those characteristics that makes them significant. The cultural differences in how that significance is ascribed are proof that our way of doing things is arbitrary. For example, cross-cultural research has found that boys and girls in most cultures show both aggressive and nurturing tendencies, but cultures vary in terms of how they encourage these characteristics between genders. In a group in Africa, young boys are responsible for taking care of babies and are encouraged to be nurturing (Wood).

Gender has been constructed over the past few centuries in political and deliberate ways that have tended to favor men in terms of power. And various academic fields joined in the quest to prove there are natural differences between men and women. While the proof they presented was credible to many at the time, it seems blatantly sexist and inaccurate today. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, scientists who measure skulls, also known as craniometrists, claimed that men were more intelligent than women because they had larger brains. Leaders in the fast-growing fields of sociology and psychology argued that women were less evolved than men and had more in common with "children and savages" than adult (white) males (Allen). Doctors and other decision-makers like politicians also used women's menstrual cycles as evidence that they were irrational or hysterical and therefore couldn't be trusted to vote, pursue higher education, or be in a leadership position. These are just a few of the many instances of how knowledge was created by seemingly legitimate scientific disciplines that we can now clearly see served to empower men and disempower women. This is a historical example of patriarchy, which is a system of social structures and practices that maintains the values, priorities, and interests of men as a group (Wood). One of the ways patriarchy is maintained is by its relative invisibility. While women have been the focus of much research on gender differences, males have been largely unexamined. Men have been treated as the generic human being to which others are compared. But that ignores the fact that men have a gender too. Masculinities studies have challenged that notion by examining how masculinities are performed.

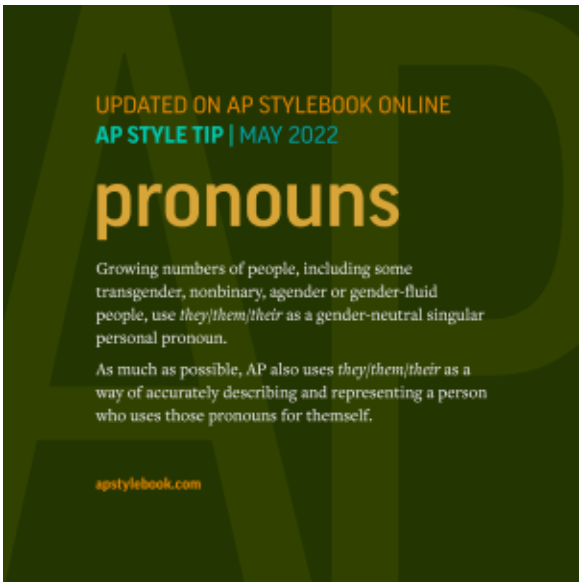
There have been challenges to the construction of gender in recent decades. Since the 1960s, scholars and activists have challenged established notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. The women's rights movement in the US dates back to the 1800s, when the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Wood). Although most women's rights movements have been led by white, middle-class women, there was overlap between those involved in the abolitionist movement to end slavery and the beginnings of the women's rights movement. Although some of the leaders of the early women's rights movement had class and education privileges, they were still taking a risk by organizing and protesting. Black women were even more at risk, and Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave, faced those risks often and gave a much-noted extemporaneous speech at a women's rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, which came to be called "Ain't I a Woman?" (Wood). Her speech highlighted the multiple layers of oppression faced by Black women.

Feminism as an intellectual and social movement advanced women's rights and our overall understanding of gender. Feminism has gotten a bad reputation based on how it has been portrayed in the media and by some politicians. When I teach courses about gender, I often ask my students to raise their hands if they consider themselves feminists. I usually only have a few, if any, who do. I've found that students I teach are hesitant to identify as a feminist because of the connotations of the word. However, when I ask students to raise their hand if they believe women have been treated unfairly and that there should be more equity,

most students raise their hands. Gender and communication scholar Julia Wood has found the same trend and explains that a desire to make a more equitable society for everyone is at the root of feminism. She shares comments from a student that capture this disconnect (Wood):

It's important to remember that there are many ways to be a feminist and to realize that some of the stereotypes about feminism are rooted in sexism and homophobia, in that feminists are reduced to "men haters" and often presumed to be lesbians. The feminist movement also gave some momentum to the transgender rights movement. Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression do not match the gender they were assigned by birth. Transgender people may or may not seek medical intervention like surgery or hormone treatments to help match their physiology with their gender identity. The term transgender includes other labels such as transsexual, transvestite, cross-dresser, and intersex, among others. Terms like hermaphrodite and she-male are not considered appropriate. As with other groups, it is best to allow someone to self-identify first and then honor their preferred label. If you are unsure of which pronouns to use when addressing someone, you can use gender-neutral language, the pronoun that matches with how they are presenting, or the pronouns they or them. If someone has long hair, makeup, and a dress on, but you think their biological sex is male due to other cues, it would be polite to address them with female pronouns, since that is the gender identity they are expressing.

In 2017, the Associated Press and the Chicago Manual of Style updated their guidelines to include the singular "they." In 2022, the AP Stylebook added inclusive content focusing on race, gender, and sexual orientation.



AP Style Tip May 2022 Posted on AP Style Public Facebook Page

Gender as a cultural identity has implications for many aspects of our lives, including real-world contexts like education and work. Schools are primary grounds for socialization, and the educational experience for males and females is different in many ways from preschool through college. Although not always intentional, schools tend to re-create the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in society. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, there are communicative elements present in school that support this (Allen). For example, Allen highlights research that shows how teachers are more likely to call on and pay attention to boys in a classroom, giving them more feedback in the form of criticism, praise, and help. This sends an implicit message that boys are more worthy of attention and valuable than girls. Teachers are also more likely to lead girls to focus on feelings and appearance and boys to focus on competition and achievement. The focus on appearance for girls can lead to anxieties about body image. Gender inequalities are also evident in the administrative structure of schools, which puts males in positions of authority more than females. While females make up 75% of the educational workforce, only 22% of superintendents and 8% of high school principals are women. Similar trends exist in colleges and universities, with women only accounting for 26% of full professors. These inequalities in schools correspond to larger inequalities in the general workforce. While there are more women in the workforce now than ever before, they still face a glass ceiling, which is a barrier to promotion to upper management. Many of my students have been surprised at the continuing pay gap that exists between men and women. According to the National Committee on Pay Equity, in 2018, the median salaries for all full-time, year-round workers showed women earning 81.6 cents for every dollar men earned, statistically the same gap as in 2017. To put this into perspective, the National Committee on Pay Equity started an event called Equal Pay Day. In 2020, Equal Pay Day was on March 31. This signifies that for a woman to earn the same amount of money a man earned in a year, she would have to work three full months extra, until March 31, to make up for the difference.

Sexuality

While race and gender are two of the first things we notice about others, sexuality is often something we view as personal and private. Although many people hold the view that a person's sexuality should be kept private, this isn't a reality for our society. One only needs to observe popular culture and media for a short time to see that sexuality permeates much of our public discourse.

Sexuality relates to culture and identity in important ways that extend beyond sexual orientation, just as race is more than the color of one's skin and gender is more than one's biological and physiological manifestations of masculinity and femininity. Sexuality isn't just physical; it is social in that we communicate with others about sexuality (Allen). Sexuality is also biological in that it connects to physiological functions that carry significant social and political meaning like puberty, menstruation, and pregnancy. Sexuality connects to public health issues like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. Sexuality is at the center of political issues like abortion, sex education, and gay and lesbian rights. While all these contribute to sexuality as a cultural identity, the focus in this section is on sexual orientation.

The most obvious way sexuality relates to identity is through sexual orientation. Sexual orientation refers to a person's primary physical and emotional sexual attraction and activity. The terms we most often use to categorize sexual orientation are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and asexual. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are sometimes referred to as sexual minorities. While the term sexual preference has been used previously, sexual orientation is more appropriate, since preference implies a simple choice. Although someone's preference for a restaurant or actor may change frequently, sexuality is not as simple. The term homosexual can be appropriate in some instances, but it carries with it a clinical and medicalized tone. As you will see in the timeline that follows, the medical community has a recent history of "treating" homosexuality with means that most would view as inhumane today. So many people prefer a term like gay, which was chosen and embraced by gay people, rather than homosexual, which was imposed by a then discriminatory medical system.

The gay and lesbian rights movement became widely recognizable in the US in the 1950s and continues on today, as evidenced by prominent issues regarding sexual orientation in national news and politics. National and international groups like the Human Rights Campaign advocate for rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) communities. While these communities are often grouped within one acronym (LGBTQ+), they are different. Gays and lesbians constitute the most visible of the groups and receive the most attention and funding. Bisexuals are rarely visible or included in popular cultural discourses or social and political movements. Transgender issues have received much more attention in recent years, but transgender identity connects to gender more than it does to sexuality. Last, queer is a term used to describe a group that is diverse in terms of identities but usually takes a more activist and at times radical stance that critiques sexual categories. While queer was long considered a derogatory label and still is by some, the queer activist movement that emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s reclaimed the word and embraced it as a positive. As you can see, there is a diversity of identities among sexual minorities, just as there is variation within races and genders.

As with other cultural identities, notions of sexuality have been socially constructed in different ways throughout human history. Sexual orientation didn't come into being as an identity category until the late 1800s. Before that, sexuality was viewed in more physical or spiritual senses that were largely separate from a person's identity. Table 1.3 traces some of the developments relevant to sexuality, identity, and communication that show how this cultural identity has been constructed over the past 3,000 years.

Table 1.3 Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	Development
1400 BCE–565 BCE	During the Greek and Roman era, there was no conception of sexual orientation as an identity. However, sexual relationships between men were accepted by some members of society. Also at this time, Greek poet Sappho wrote about love between women.
533 BCE	Byzantine emperor Justinian makes adultery and same-sex sexual acts punishable by death.

1533	Civil law in England indicates the death penalty can be given for same-sex sexual acts between men.
1810	Napoleonic Code in France removes all penalties for any sexual activity between consenting adults.
1861	England removes the death penalty for same-sex sexual acts.
1892	The term heterosexuality is coined to refer to a form of “sexual perversion” in which people engage in sexual acts for reasons other than reproduction.
1897	Dr. Magnus Hirschfield founds the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin. It is the first gay rights organization.
1900–1930	Doctors “treat” homosexuality with castration, electroshock therapy, and incarceration in mental hospitals.
1924	The first gay rights organization in the US, the Chicago Society for Human Rights, is founded.
1933–44	Tens of thousands of gay men are sent to concentration camps under Nazi rule. The prisoners are forced to wear pink triangles on their uniforms. The pink triangle was later reclaimed as a symbol of gay rights.
1934	The terms heterosexuality and homosexuality appear in Webster’s dictionary with generally the same meaning the terms hold today.
1948	American sexologist Alfred Kinsey’s research reveals that more people than thought have engaged in same-sex sexual activity. His research highlights the existence of bisexuality.
1969	On June 27, patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York City fight back as police raided the bar (a common practice used by police at the time to harass gay people). “The Stonewall Riot,” as it came to be called, was led by gay, lesbian, and transgender patrons of the bar, many of whom were working class and/or people of color.
1974	The American Psychiatric Association removes its reference to homosexuality as a mental illness.
1999	The Vermont Supreme Court rules that the state must provide legal rights to same-sex couples. In 2000, Vermont becomes the first state to offer same-sex couples civil unions.

2003	The US Supreme Court rules that Texas's sodomy law is unconstitutional, which effectively decriminalizes consensual same-sex relations.
2011	The US military policy "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is repealed, allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly.

Ability

There is resistance to classifying ability as a cultural identity because we follow a medical model of disability that places disability as an individual and medical rather than a social and cultural issue. While much of what distinguishes able-bodied and cognitively able from disabled is rooted in science, biology, and physiology, there are important sociocultural dimensions. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Allen). An impairment is defined as "any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological" (Allen). This definition is important because it notes the social aspect of disability in that people's life activities are limited and the relational aspect of disability in that the perception of a disability by others can lead someone to be classified as such. Ascribing an identity of disabled to a person can be problematic. If there is a mental or physical impairment, it should be diagnosed by a credentialed expert. If there isn't an impairment, then the label of disabled can have negative impacts, as this label carries social and cultural significance. People are tracked into various educational programs based on their physical and cognitive abilities, and there are many cases of people being mistakenly labeled disabled who were treated differently despite their protest of the ascribed label. Students who did not speak English as a first language, for example, were—and perhaps still are—sometimes put into special education classes.



Wounded Warrior Regiment – CC BY-NC 2.0.

As recently disabled veterans integrate back into civilian life, they will be offered assistance and accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Ability, just as the other cultural identities discussed, has institutionalized privileges and disadvantages associated with it. Ableism is the system of beliefs and practices that produces a physical and mental standard that is projected as normal for a human being and labels deviations from it abnormal, resulting in unequal treatment and access to resources. Ability privilege refers to the unearned advantages that are provided for people who fit the cognitive and physical norms (Allen). I once attended a workshop about ability privilege led by a man who was visually impaired. He talked about how, unlike other cultural identities that are typically stable over a lifetime, ability fluctuates for most people. We have all experienced times when we are more or less able.

Perhaps you broke your leg and had to use crutches or a wheelchair for a while. Getting sick for a prolonged period also lessens our abilities, but we may fully recover from any of these examples and regain our ability privilege. Whether you've experienced a short-term disability or not, the majority of us will become less physically and cognitively able as we get older.

Statistically, people with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the United States, with an estimated 20% of people

five years or older living with some form of disability (Allen). Medical advances have allowed some people with disabilities to live longer and more active lives than before, which has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. This number also increased with the return of thousands of veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with physical disabilities or psychological impairments such as posttraumatic stress disorder.

As disability has been constructed in US history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to "political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm." They framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the "scientific" category of "feeblemindedness," which led to their institutionalization (Carlson). Arguments supporting racial inequality and tighter immigration restrictions also drew on notions of disability, framing certain racial groups as prone to mental retardation, mental illness, or uncontrollable emotions and actions. See Table 1.4 for a timeline of developments related to ability, identity, and communication. These thoughts led to a dark time in US history, as the eugenics movement sought to limit the reproduction of people deemed as deficient.

Table 1.4 Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	Development
400 BCE	The Greeks make connections between biology, physiology, and actions. For example, they make a connection between epilepsy and a disorder of the mind but still consider the source to be supernatural or divine.
30–480 BCE	People with disabilities are viewed with pity by early Christians and thought to be so conditioned because of an impurity that could possibly be addressed through prayer.
500–1500	As beliefs in the supernatural increased during the Middle Ages, people with disabilities are seen as manifestations of evil and are ridiculed and persecuted.
1650–1789	During the Enlightenment, the first large-scale movements toward the medical model are made, as science and medicine advanced and society turns to a view of human rationality.
1900s	The eugenics movement in the US begins. Laws are passed to sterilize the "socially inadequate," and during this time, more than sixty thousand people were forcibly sterilized in thirty-three states.
1930s	People with disabilities become the first targets of experimentation and mass execution by the Nazis.
1970s	The independent living movement becomes a prominent part of the disability rights movement.
1990	The Americans with Disabilities Act is passed through Congress and signed into law.

During the early part of the 1900s, the eugenics movement was the epitome of the move to rehabilitate or reject people with disabilities (Allen). This was a brand of social engineering that was indicative of strong public support for the rationality of science to cure society's problems (Allen). A sterilization law written in 1914 "proposed to authorize sterilization of the socially

inadequate," which included the "feebleminded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, and dependent" (Lombardo). During the eugenics movement in the US, more than sixty thousand people in thirty-three states were involuntarily sterilized (Allen). Although the eugenics movement as it was envisioned and enacted then is unthinkable today, some who have studied the eugenics movement of the early 1900s have issued warnings that a newly packaged version of eugenics could be upon us. As human genome mapping and DNA manipulation become more accessible, advanced genetic testing could enable parents to eliminate undesirable aspects or enhance desirable characteristics of their children before they are born, creating "designer children" (Spice).

Much has changed for people with disabilities in the United States in the past fifty years. The independent living movement (ILM) was a part of the disability rights movement that took shape along with other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The ILM calls for more individual and collective action toward social change by people with disabilities. Some of the goals of the ILM include reframing disability as a social and political rather than just a medical issue, a shift toward changing society rather than just rehabilitating people with disabilities, a view of accommodations as civil rights rather than charity, and more involvement by people with disabilities in the formulation and execution of policies relating to them (Longmore). As society better adapts to people with disabilities, there will be more instances of interability communication taking place.

Interability communication is communication between people with differing ability levels—for example, a hearing person communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or a person who doesn't use a wheelchair communicating with someone who uses a wheelchair. Since many people are unsure of how to communicate with a person with disabilities, the CDC has provided tips for communicating with and about people with disabilities.

This section explored how our primary cultural identities—race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability—have been shaped over time through history, social interaction, and the language we use to describe them. By tracing the "communicative histories" of these identities, we can see how the categories we often take for granted—like racial classifications on the US Census or evolving terminology in disability rights—have shifted dramatically across generations. Regardless of where you fall on the political spectrum, one thing is clear: understanding *how* these categories developed, and *why* the language around them matters to different groups of people, makes you a more informed and effective communicator. When we understand the experiences and perspectives behind the words people use to describe themselves, we are better equipped to connect across difference, reduce misunderstanding, and engage respectfully with the full diversity of people we encounter in our personal, academic, and professional lives.

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7.5: Intercultural Communication Competence

Throughout this book, we have been putting various tools in our communication toolbox to improve our communication competence. Many of these tools can be translated into intercultural contexts. While building any form of competence requires effort, building intercultural communication competence often requires us to take more risks. Some of these risks require us to leave our comfort zones and adapt to new and uncertain situations. In this section, we will learn some of the skills needed to be an interculturally competent communicator.

Components of Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. There are numerous components of ICC. Some key components include motivation, self- and other-knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty.

Motivation

Initially, a person's motivation for communicating with people from other cultures must be considered. **Motivation** refers to *the root of a person's desire to foster intercultural relationships and can be intrinsic or extrinsic* (Martin and Nakayama). Put simply, if a person isn't motivated to communicate with people from different cultures, then the components of ICC discussed next don't really matter. If a person has a healthy curiosity that drives him or her toward intercultural encounters to learn more about self and others, then there is a foundation from which to build additional competence-relevant attitudes and skills. This intrinsic motivation makes intercultural communication a voluntary, rewarding, and lifelong learning process. Motivation can also be extrinsic, meaning that the desire for intercultural communication is driven by an outside reward like money, power, or recognition. While both types of motivation can contribute to ICC, context may further enhance or impede a person's motivation to communicate across cultures.



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Members of dominant groups are often less motivated, intrinsically and extrinsically, toward intercultural communication than members of nondominant groups, because they don't see the incentives for doing so. Having more power in communication encounters can create an unbalanced situation where the individual from the nondominant group is expected to exhibit competence or the ability to adapt to the communication behaviors and attitudes of the other. Even in situations where extrinsic rewards like securing an overseas business investment are at stake, it is likely that the foreign investor is much more accustomed to adapting to US business customs and communication than vice versa. This expectation that others will adapt to our communication can be unconscious, but later ICC skills we will learn will help bring it to awareness.

The unbalanced situation I just described is a daily reality for many individuals with nondominant identities. Their motivation toward intercultural communication may be driven by survival in terms of functioning effectively in dominant contexts. Recall the phenomenon known as code-switching discussed earlier, in which individuals from nondominant groups adapt their communication to fit in with the dominant group. In such instances, African Americans may talk white by conforming to what is called standard English, women in corporate environments may adopt masculine communication patterns, people who are

LBGTQ+ may self-censor and avoid discussing their same- or nondominant-gendered partners with coworkers, and people with nonvisible disabilities may not disclose them to avoid judgment.

While intrinsic motivation captures an idealistic view of intercultural communication as rewarding in its own right, many contexts create extrinsic motivation. In either case, there is a risk that an individual's motivation can still lead to incompetent communication. For example, it would be exploitative for an extrinsically motivated person to pursue intercultural communication solely for an external reward and then abandon the intercultural relationship once the reward is attained. These situations highlight the relational aspect of ICC, meaning that the motivation of all parties should be considered. Motivation alone cannot create ICC.

Self- and Other-Knowledge

Knowledge supplements motivation and is an important part of building ICC. Knowledge includes self- and other-awareness, mindfulness, and cognitive flexibility. Building knowledge of our own cultures, identities, and communication patterns takes more than passive experience (Martin and Nakayama). We learn who we are through our interactions with others. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because we may realize that people think of our identities differently than we thought. For example, when one student lived in Sweden, her Swedish roommates often discussed their wariness about befriending students from the US. They perceived US Americans as shallow because they were friendly and exciting while in Sweden but didn't remain friends after they left. Although the American student was initially upset by their assessment, she came to see the truth in it. Swedes are generally more reserved than US Americans and take longer to form close friendships. The comparatively extroverted nature of the Americans led some of the Swedes to overestimate the depth of their relationship, which ultimately hurt them when the Americans didn't stay in touch. This made her more aware of how her communication was perceived, enhancing her self-knowledge. She also learned more about communication behaviors of the Swedes, which contributed to her knowledge of others.

The most effective way to develop other-knowledge is by direct and thoughtful encounters with other cultures. However, people may not readily have these opportunities for a variety of reasons. Despite the overall diversity in the US, many people still only interact with people who are similar to them. Even in a racially diverse educational setting, for example, people often group with people of their own race. While a heterosexual person may have a gay or lesbian friend or relative, they likely spend most of their time with other heterosexuals. Unless you interact with people with disabilities as part of your job or have a person with a disability in your friend or family group, you likely spend most of your time interacting with able-bodied people. Living in a rural area may limit your ability to interact with a range of cultures, and most people do not travel internationally regularly. Because of this, we may have to make a determined effort to interact with other cultures or rely on educational sources like college classes, books, or documentaries. Learning another language is also a good way to learn about a culture because you can then read the news or watch movies in the native language, which can offer insights that are lost in translation. It is important to note, though, that we must evaluate the credibility of the source of our knowledge, whether it is a book, person, or another source. Also, knowledge of another language does not automatically equate to ICC.

Developing self- and other-knowledge is an ongoing process that will continue to adapt and grow as we encounter new experiences. Mindfulness and cognitive complexity will help as we continue to build our ICC (Pusch). **Mindfulness** is a *state of self- and other-monitoring that informs later reflection on communication interactions*. As mindful communicators, we should ask questions that focus on the interactive process like "How is our communication going? What are my reactions? What are their reactions?" Being able to adapt our communication at the moment based on our answers to these questions is a skill that comes with a high level of ICC. Reflecting on the communication encounter later to see what can be learned is also a way to build ICC. We should then be able to incorporate what we learned into our communication frameworks, which requires cognitive flexibility. **Cognitive flexibility** refers to *the ability to continually supplement and revise existing knowledge to create new categories rather than forcing new knowledge into old categories*. Cognitive flexibility helps prevent our knowledge from becoming stale and also prevents the formation of stereotypes and can help us avoid prejudging an encounter or jumping to conclusions. In summary, to be better intercultural communicators, we should know much about others and ourselves and be able to reflect on and adapt our knowledge as we gain new experiences.

Tolerance for Uncertainty

Motivation and knowledge can inform us as we gain new experiences, but how we feel in the moment of intercultural encounters is also important. Tolerance for uncertainty refers to an individual's attitude about and level of comfort in uncertain situations (Martin and Nakayama). Some people perform better in uncertain situations than others, and intercultural encounters often bring

up uncertainty. Whether communicating with someone of a different gender, race, or nationality, we are often wondering what we should or shouldn't do or say. Situations of uncertainty most often become clearer as they progress, but the anxiety that an individual with a low tolerance for uncertainty feels may lead them to leave the situation or otherwise communicate less competently. Individuals with a high tolerance for uncertainty may exhibit more patience, waiting on new information to become available or seeking out information, which may then increase the understanding of the situation and lead to a more successful outcome (Pusch). Individuals who are intrinsically motivated toward intercultural communication may have a higher tolerance for uncertainty in that their curiosity leads them to engage with others who are different because they find the self- and other-knowledge gained rewarding.

How can ICC be built and achieved? Research shows that the two main ways to build ICC are through experiential learning and reflective practices (Bednarz). We must first realize that competence isn't any one thing. Part of being competent is being able to assess new situations and adapt your existing knowledge to new contexts. What it means to be competent will vary depending on your physical location, your role (personal, professional, etc.), and your life stage, among other things. Sometimes we will know or be able to figure out what is expected of us in a given situation, but sometimes we may need to act in unexpected ways to meet the needs of a situation. Competence enables us to better cope with the unexpected, adapt to the nonroutine, and connect to uncommon frameworks. ICC is less about a list of rules and more about a box of tools.

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7.6: Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter 7 Review

Big Picture

- Intercultural communication happens in the "in-between" of people and contexts. It's dynamic, sometimes contradictory, and best understood with a dialectical (both/and) mindset.
- Goal: build curiosity, flexibility, and practical skills to reduce misunderstanding and communicate respectfully across differences.

Core concepts and terms

- Culture: learned patterns of beliefs, values, and behaviors shared by a group.
- Intercultural communication: interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds.
- Provisionalism: holding your views lightly and staying open to other perspectives.
- Culture shock: discomfort in unfamiliar cultural environments.
- Ascribed vs. avowed identity: labels given to us vs. identities we claim.
- Social constructionism: identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, ability) develop through history, communication, and social interaction.

Key frameworks for "hidden rules"

- Hofstede's dimensions: Individualism–Collectivism; Power Distance; Uncertainty Avoidance; Masculinity–Femininity; Long- vs. Short-Term Orientation.
- Hall's variations:
  - High- vs. Low-Context: meaning in situational cues vs. explicit words.
  - Time orientation: Monochronic (linear, schedule-first) vs. Polychronic (flexible, relationship-first).

Dialectical approach (thinking in "both/and")

- Why it matters: avoids rigid either/or thinking; helps you adapt in real situations.
- Six dialectics with quick cues:
  - Cultural–Individual: group patterns vs. personal style.
  - Personal–Contextual: style shifts by setting (work vs. home).
  - Differences–Similarities: we are both alike and different.
  - Static–Dynamic: cultures feel stable yet continually change.
  - History/Past–Present/Future: past events shape present talk.
  - Privileges–Disadvantages: advantages and barriers can coexist across identities (intersectionality).

Salient Cultural identities

- Big idea: Identity categories are constructed and change over time; communication plays a central role in that construction.
- Race: A socially constructed category based on perceived physical differences, race has shifted across history and labels, varies within broad groups (e.g., "Asian American"), and should not be assumed to match a person's chosen identification.
- Gender: An identity constructed through socialization and communication about masculinity and femininity, gender appears stable yet changes over time, and research finds more similarities than differences between men and women.
- Sexual orientation: Treated as an identity category only since the late 1800s, sexual orientation has evolved through changing language, laws, and social norms that shape how people name and express their identities.
- Ability: Moving from a medical to a social model reframes disability as the result of environmental and communicative barriers, guiding inclusive language and design (e.g., captions, access features).
- Intersectionality: Multiple identities intersect to produce shifting mixes of advantage and disadvantage across contexts,

meaning no one is entirely privileged or entirely disadvantaged.

Identity, language, and interaction

- Code-switching: shifting speech styles to fit norms, reduce negative judgments, or gain access across contexts.
- Spotlighting: asking someone to speak for an entire group—avoid this; invite voluntary perspectives without pressure.
- Language policy snapshot: The U.S. has no federally designated national language; debates about "English-only" reflect differing views about identity and belonging.

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

- Motivation: curiosity and willingness to engage across difference.
- Knowledge: self-knowledge (your cultural lens) and other-knowledge (learn with humility).
- Skills: listening, observing, asking good questions, managing ambiguity, adapting directness/formality/time and nonverbal cues.
- Tolerance for uncertainty: staying effective when rules are unclear.

Applied examples

- Time conflicts: monochronic vs. polychronic teammates can co-create norms (buffer time, clarify deadlines, schedule relationship check-ins).
- Power distance: a U.S. manager adapting to a higher-formality environment adjusts titles, meeting etiquette, and feedback style.

Quick self-check

- Give one example each of high- and low-context communication.
- Identify which dialectic explains a recent misunderstanding you observed.
- How have labels for one identity category changed over time, and why does that matter for respectful communication?
- Define code-switching and give a context where it may occur.
- List two actions that increase your tolerance for uncertainty.

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8: GROUP COMMUNICATION

8.1: What is Group Communication?
8.2: Forming Groups
8.3: Dynamics
8.4: Group Roles
8.5: Leadership in Groups
8.6: Decision Making In Groups
8.7: Chapter 8 Summary

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8.1: What is Group Communication?

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

Have you ever had this happen to you in a college class?: At the beginning of the semester your professor hands out the syllabus and explains that a group project is part of the course requirements. You, and others in the class, groan at the idea of this project because you have experienced the difficulties and frustrations of working in a group, especially when your grade depends on the work of others. Does this sound familiar? Why do you think so many students react negatively to these types of assignments? Group work can be fraught with complications. But, the reality is, many companies are promoting groups as the model working environment (Forbes).

Forbes magazine released an article titled The Ten Skills Employers Most Want in 2015 Graduates which stated that technical knowledge related to the job is not nearly as important as effective teamwork and communications skills. In fact, the top three skills listed include, 1) ability to work in a team structure, 2) ability to make decisions and solve problems, and 3) ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization. Even non-Communication majors need to develop effective group communication skills to succeed at work and life.



Figure 8.1.1: "When I die, I would like the people I did group projects with to lower me in to my grave so they can let me down one last time." – Jessica Clydesdale, frustrated student

Most likely, you have already spent, and will continue to spend, a great deal of your time working in groups. You may be involved with school athletics in which you are part of a specialized group called a team. You may be part of a work or professional group. Many of you participate in social, religious, and/or political groups. The family in which you were raised, regardless of the configuration, is also a group. No matter what the specific focus—sports, profession, politics, or family—all groups share some common features.

While group communication is growing in popularity and emphasis, both at the academic and corporate levels, it is not a new area of study. The emergence of group communication study came about in the mid 1950s, following World War II, and has been a focus of study ever since. Group communication is often closely aligned with interpersonal communication and organizational communication. In your personal, civic, and professional lives, you will engage in group communication. Let's take a look at what constitutes a group or team.

Defining Groups and Teams

To understand group and team communication, we must first understand the definition of a group. Many people think that a group is simply a collection of people, but that is only part of it. If you walk out your front door and pull together the first ten people you see, do you have a group? No. According to Wilson and Hanna (1990), **groups** are defined as *"a collection of three or more individuals who interact about some common problem or interdependent goal and can exert mutual influence over one another"* (p. 14). They go on to say that the three key components of groups are "size, goal orientation, and mutual influence" (p. 14). Interpersonal communication is often thought about in terms of dyads, or pairs. Organizational communication might be thought of as a group that is larger than 12 people. While there are exceptions, for the most part, group size is often thought of in terms of 3-12 people. If the ten people you gathered outside of your front door were all neighbors working together as part of a "neighborhood watch" to create safety in the community, then you would indeed have a group.

For those of you who have participated on athletic teams you'll notice that these definitions also apply to a team. While all of the qualities of groups hold true for teams, teams have additional qualities not necessarily present for all groups. We like to define a **team** as a *specialized group with a strong sense of belonging and commitment to each other that shapes an overall collective identity.* Members of a team each have their own part, or role, to fulfill in order to achieve the team's greater goals. One member's strengths can be other member's weaknesses, so working in a team is beneficial when balancing individual input. While all members of an athletic team share some athletic ability and a special appreciation for a particular sport, members of a football team, for example, have highly specialized skills, as indicated by the various positions on the team—quarterback, receiver, and running back. In addition to athletic teams, work and professional teams also share these qualities. Now that you know how to define groups and teams, let's look at characteristics of groups and teams, as well as the different types of groups and teams.

Characteristics of Groups

- **Interdependence**. Groups cannot be defined simply as three or more people talking to each other or meeting together. Instead, a primary characteristic of groups is that members of a group are dependent on the others for the group to maintain its existence and achieve its goals. In essence, interdependence is the *recognition by those in a group of their need for the others in the group* (Lewin; Cragon, Wright& Kasch; Sherblom). Imagine playing in a basketball game as an individual against the five members of another team. Even if you're considered the best basketball player in the world, it's highly unlikely you could win a game against five other people. You must rely on four other teammates to make it a successful game.



- **Interaction**. It probably seems obvious to you that there must be interaction for groups to exist. However, what kind of interaction must exist? Since we all communicate every day, there must be something that distinguishes the interaction in groups from other forms of communication. Cragon et al. (2008) state that the primary defining characteristic of group interaction is that it is purposeful. They go on to break down purposeful interaction into four types: *problem solving, role playing, team building, and trust building* (7). Without purposeful interaction a true group does not exist. Roles, norms, and relationships between members are created through interaction. If you're put into a group for a class assignment, for example, your first interaction probably centers around exchanging contact information, settings times to meet, and starting to focus on the task at hand. This is purposeful interaction in order to achieve a goal.
- **Synergy**. One advantage of working in groups and teams is that they allow us to accomplish things we wouldn't be able to accomplish on our own. Groups live out the adage, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." In an orchestra or band, each person is there to perform, helping the larger unit make music in a way that cannot be accomplished without each member working together.

- **Common Goals**. Having interaction and synergy would be relatively pointless in groups without a common goal. People who comprise groups are brought together for a reason or a purpose. While most members of a group have individual goals, a group is largely defined by the common goals of the group. Think of the example at the beginning of the chapter: Your common goal in a class group is to learn, complete an assignment, and earn a grade. While there may be differences regarding individual goals in the group (what final grade is acceptable for example), or how to achieve the common goals, the group is largely defined by the common goals it shares.
- **Cohesiveness**. When we feel like we are part of something larger, we experience a sense of cohesion or wholeness, and may find a purpose that is bigger than our own individual desires and goals. It is the sense of connection and participation that characterizes the interaction of a group as different from the defined interaction among loosely connected individuals. If you've ever participated in a group that achieved its goal successfully, you are probably able to reflect back on your feelings of connection with the other members of that group.

Types of Groups

Not all groups are the same or brought together for the same reasons. Brilhart and Galanes (1998) categorize groups "on the basis of the reason they were formed and the human needs they serve" (p. 9).

- **Primary Groups**. Primary groups are ones we form to help us realize our human needs like inclusion and affection. They are not generally formed to accomplish a task, but rather, to help us meet our fundamental needs as relational beings like acceptance, love, and affection. These groups are generally longer term than other groups and include family, roommates, and other relationships that meet as groups on a regular basis (Brilhart & Galanes). These special people in your life constituate primary groups because they offer love and support for the long run, and given this, primary groups are typically more meaningful than secondary groups.

- **Secondary Groups**. Unlike primary groups, we form secondary groups to accomplish work, perform a task, solve problems, and make decisions (Brilhart & Galanes; Sherblom; Cragan, Wright & Kasch). Larson and LaFasto state that secondary groups have "a specific performance objective or recognizable goal to be attained; and coordination of activity among the members of the team is required for attainment of the team goal or objective" (19).



- **Activity Groups**. Activity Groups are ones we form for the purpose of participating in activities. I'm sure your campus has many clubs that are organized for the sole purpose of doing activities. On a campus in California, for example, a popular club is the Surf Club, in which members meet for the purpose of scheduling surfing times, arranging rides, and choosing where to surf.

- **Personal Growth Groups**. We form Personal Growth Groups to obtain support and feedback from others, as well as to grow as a person. Personal Growth Groups may be thought of as therapy groups. An example that is probably familiar to you is Alcoholics Anonymous, where alcoholics can share their stories and struggles and get support from others affected by alcohol. There are many personal growth groups available for helping us develop as people through group interaction with others, such as book clubs, weight watchers, and spiritual groups.

- **Learning Groups**. Learning Groups focus mainly on obtaining new information and gaining knowledge. If you have ever been assigned to a group in a college class, it most likely was a learning group with the purpose of interacting in ways that can help those in the group learn new things about the course content.

- **Problem-Solving Groups**. These groups are created for the express purpose of solving a specific problem. The very nature of organizing people into this type of group is to get them to collectively figure out effective solutions to the problem they have before them. Committees are an excellent example of people who are brought together to solve problems.

After looking at the various types of groups, it's probably easy for you to recognize just how much of your daily interaction occurs within the contexts of groups. The reality is, we spend a great deal of time in groups, and understanding the types of groups you're in, as well as their purpose, goes a long way toward helping you function as a productive member.

The Importance of Studying Group Communication

One of the reasons communication scholars study groups and teams is because of the overwhelming amount of time we spend interacting in groups in professional contexts. More and more professional organizations are turning to groups and teams as an essential way of conducting business and getting things done. Even professions that are seemingly independent, such as being a college professor, are heavily laden with group work.

Another vital area of group communication concerns the study of social change or social movement organizations. Groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the National Organization of Women (NOW) are all groups bound together by a shared social and political commitment—-to promote the rights of nonhuman animals, Black Americans, and women respectively. While individuals can be committed to these ideas, the social, political, and legal rights afforded to groups like these would not have been possible through individual action alone. It was when groups of like-minded people came together with shared commitments and goals, pooling their skills and resources, that change occurred. Just about any Interest Group you can think of has a presence in Washington D.C. and spends money to maintain that presence.

In summary, group communication is an essential and unavoidable aspect of personal, civic, and professional life. While the challenges of group work often lead to frustration, the ability to function effectively within a team remains one of the most highly valued skills by modern employers. By understanding the fundamental characteristics of groups—such as interdependence, purposeful interaction, synergy, and common goals—individuals can better navigate the various types of groups they encounter, from primary support systems like family to secondary task-oriented teams in the workplace. Ultimately, the study of group communication reveals that collective effort not only allows us to achieve goals beyond our individual reach but also serves as a powerful engine for social change and personal growth.

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8.2: Forming Groups

Sometimes we join a group because we want to. Other times, we might be assigned to work in groups in a class or at work. Either way, Lumsden, Lumsden and Wiethoff give three reasons why we form groups. First, we may join groups because *we share similar interests or attractions* with other group members. If you are a certain major in college, chances are you share some of the same interests as others in your class groups. Also, you might find yourself attracted to others in your group for romantic, friendship, political, religious or professional reasons. A second reason we join groups is called **drive reduction**. Essentially, we join groups so *our work with others reduces the drive to fulfill our needs by spreading out involvement*. As Maslow explains, we have drives for physiological needs like security, love, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Working with others helps us achieve these needs thereby reducing our obligation to meet these needs ourselves (Maslow; Paulson). If you accomplished a task successfully for a group, your group members likely complimented your work, thus fulfilling some of your self-esteem needs. If you had done the same work only for yourself, the building up of your self-esteem may not have occurred. A third reason we join groups is for **reinforcement**. We are often motivated to do things for the rewards they bring. Participating in *groups provides reinforcement from others in the pursuit of our goals and rewards*.

Much like interpersonal relationships, groups go through a series of stages as they come together. These stages are called *forming, storming, norming, and performing* (Tuckman (1965); Fisher (1970); Sherblom (2002); Benson (2010); Rose, Hopthrow & Crisp (2012). Groups that form to achieve a task often go through a fifth stage called termination that occurs after a group accomplishes its goal. Let's look at each of the stages of group formation and termination.

- **Forming**. Obviously, for a group to exist and work together its members must first form the group. During the forming stage, group members begin to set the parameters of the group by establishing what characteristics identify the members of the group as a group. During this stage, the group's goals are made generally clear to members, initial questions and concerns are addressed, and initial role assignments may develop. This is the stage when group norms begin to be negotiated and established. Essentially, norms are a code of conduct which may be explicit or assumed and dictate acceptable and expected behavior of the group.

- **Storming**. The storming stage might be considered comparable to the "first fight" of a romantic couple. After the initial politeness passes in the forming stage, group members begin to feel more comfortable expressing their opinions about how the group should operate and the participation of other members in the group. Given the complexity of meeting both individual goals as well as group goals, there is constant negotiation among group members regarding participation and how a group should operate. Imagine being assigned to a group for class and you discover that all the members of the group are content with getting a C grade, but you want an A. If you confront your group members to challenge them to have higher expectations, you are in the storming stage.

- **Norming**. Back to our romantic couple example, if the couple can survive the first fight, they often emerge on the other side of the conflict feeling stronger and more cohesive. The same is true in groups. If a group is able to work through the initial conflict of the storming stage, there is the opportunity to really solidify the group's norms and get to the task at hand as a cohesive group. Norming signifies that the members of a group are willing to abide by group rules and values to achieve the group's goals.

- **Performing**. Performing is the stage we most often associate as the defining characteristic of groups. This stage is marked by a decrease in tensions, less conscious attention to norm establishment, and greater focus on the actual work at hand in order to accomplish the group's goals. While there still may be episodes of negotiating conflict and re-establishing norms, performing is about getting to the business at hand. When you are in a weekly routine of meeting at the library to work on a group project, you are in the performing stage.



- **Terminating**. Groups that are assigned a specific goal and timeline will experience the fifth stage of group formation, termination. Think about groups you have been assigned to in college. We're willing to bet that the group did not continue once you achieved the required assignment and earned your grade. This is not to say that we do not continue relationships with other group members. But, the defining characteristics of the group established during the forming stage have come to an end, and thus, so has the group.

We join groups for three core reasons: shared attraction and interests, to reduce the strain of meeting needs alone (think Maslow's security, belonging, esteem), and for the social reinforcement that rewards progress. From there, teams typically move through Tuckman's arc—forming, storming, norming, performing, and often terminating once the task is done. Beyond the definitions, the real leverage is practical: anticipate storming so you can channel conflict into clearer norms; design early "wins" to feed reinforcement; and explicitly map group goals to members' psychological needs to sustain motivation. Treat termination as part of the plan—capture lessons, recognize contributions, and preserve relationships for the next collaboration. In short, groups don't just happen; they're engineered through attention to motivation, predictable stages, and deliberate closure.

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8.3: Dynamics

Any time a group of people comes together, new dynamics are put into place that differ from the dynamics present in our typical dyadic interactions. In this section, we'll explore the invisible forces that shape how we work together, from the "social glue" of cohesion and the shared language of socialization to the high-stakes pressures of conformity. By understanding these dynamics, you will learn why some groups feel like a well-oiled machine while others fall into the trap of groupthink, and how you can navigate these forces to become a more effective communicator in any team.

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* (Molloy, 2020). 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 social cohesion, and vice versa, but the purpose of the group and the individual members will determine the balance.

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.

Climate

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. The following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale (Marston & Hecht, 1988):

- Participation: Group members feel better when they are included in the discussion and part of the group's functioning.
- Messages: Confirming messages help build relational dimensions within a group, while clear, organized, and relevant messages help build task dimensions.
- Feedback: Positive, constructive, and relevant feedback contributes 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 is not 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.

Socialization

Group socialization refers to the *process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors*. Group norms, rules, and cohesion can be created and maintained through socialization.

It is also through socialization that a shared identity and social reality develop among group members, but this development is dependent on several factors. For example, groups with higher levels of cohesion are more likely to have members who "buy into" rules and norms, which aids in socialization. The need for socialization also changes throughout a group's lifespan. If membership in a group is stable, long-term members should not need much socialization. However, when new members join a group, existing members must take time to engage in socialization. When a new group is formed, socialization will be an ongoing process as group members negotiate rules and procedures, develop norms, and create a shared history over time.

Group Pressures

There must be some 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. In this section, we will discuss how rules and norms gain their power through internal and external pressures and how these pressures can have positive and negative effects.

Conformity

Some people are generally 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. 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. Deviating from the group's rules and norms that a member internalized during socialization can lead to self-imposed feelings of guilt or shame that can then initiate corrective behaviors and discourage the member from going against the group.

External pressures in the form of group policies, rewards, or punishments, or other forces outside of individual group members, also exert conformity pressure. Regarding group policies, groups with an official admission process may have a probation period during which new members' membership is contingent on 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.

Groupthink

Groupthink is a *negative group phenomenon characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas or courses of action resulting from high cohesion levels and/or high conformity pressures* (Janis, 1972). Essentially, it is a group condition of cohesiveness beyond rationality. When group members fall victim to groupthink, the effect is an uncritical acceptance of decisions or suggestions for plans of action to accomplish a task or goal. We can better understand groupthink by examining its symptoms, causes, and methods of reducing groupthink.

Symptoms of groupthink include invulnerability, illusion of morality, stereotyping, and illusion of unanimity. **Invulnerability** is *the notion that nothing can go wrong for the group*. Groupthink groups feel they can make decisions without any negative ramifications. Groupthink groups also experience an **illusion of morality**. Group members tend to *think they are morally right and on the 'correct' side*. Groupthink groups also **stereotype** others outside the group, resulting in *simplified and inaccurate perspectives of non-group members*. The **illusion of unanimity** refers to *the perceived total group agreement in groupthink groups*. Even if group members disagree, they likely will not express their disagreement. Groupthink groups typically reach unanimous decisions; all group members go along to get along. Group meetings that appear to go smoothly, with only positive interactions among happy, friendly people, may seem ideal, but such interactions can be symptomatic of groupthink. Groupthink groups also tend to rush to agreement and fear argumentation. A typical groupthink group would appear as the antithesis of a group experiencing conflict.

To minimize the chances of groupthink, group members should pursue the following strategies. First, each group member should serve the role of critical evaluator. In that role, members should ask questions and analyze the group's position on issues and the pros and cons of proposed solutions. Second, if possible, have more than one group independently work on the same problem. Temporarily dividing the group into two sub-groups will provide different perspectives, fostering healthy disagreement. Third, give members a second chance to express doubts before finalizing a decision. Fourth, encourage and reward the expression of minority or dissenting opinions. Fifth, allow members to submit ideas before a discussion to reduce the likelihood that their

opinions are swayed by members who propose ideas early in a discussion. Sixth, as a group member, ask questions and express disagreement.

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 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. A group leader can handle procedural conflict, especially if the leader has put group procedures in place or has the individual power to change them.

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 should not 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.

Interpersonal conflict emerges from conflict between individual members of the group. Whereas procedural conflict deals with *how,* substantive conflict deals with *what*, and 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. Interpersonal conflict can be the result of avoided or improperly handled procedural or substantive conflict that festers and becomes personal rather than task-focused. 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. Leaders can also meet with people involved in interpersonal conflict privately to help them engage in perception checking and act as mediators, if needed.

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 resent 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 completing a task, but conflict may only be pushed to the side and left unaddressed. Third-party mediation can help move a group past a conflict. It may create fewer feelings of animosity, since the person mediating and perhaps making a decision is not a group member. In some cases, the leader can act as an internal third-party mediator to help other group members work productively through their conflict.

Conflict, when properly handled, can result in a group having 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 because of well-managed conflict. Occasional experiences of tension and unrest followed by resolutions make groups feel like they have accomplished something, which can lead them to not dread conflict and give them the confidence to 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 a loss of members as people weigh

the costs and rewards of membership.

Time Constraints

By now you should recognize that working in groups and teams has many advantages. However, one issue that is of central importance to group work is time. When working in groups time can be both a source of frustration, as well as a reason to work together. One obvious problem is that it takes much longer to make decisions with two or more people as opposed to just one person. Another problem is that it can be difficult to coordinate meeting times when taking into account people's busy lives of work, school, family, and other personal commitments. On the flip side, when time is limited and there are multiple tasks to accomplish, it is often more efficient to work in a group where tasks can be delegated according to resources and skills. When each member can take on certain aspects of a project, this limits the amount of work an individual would have to do if he/she were solely responsible for the project.

For example, Alex, Kellsie and Teresa all had a project to work on. The project was large and would take a full semester to complete. They had to split up the amount of work equally to each person as well as based on skills. The thought of doing all the work alone was daunting in terms of the required time and labor. Being able to delegate assignments and work together to achieve a professional result for their project indicated that the best option for them was to work together. In the end, the group's work produced different results and views that you wouldn't have necessarily come to working alone. On the flip side, imagine having to work in a group where you believe you could do just the same on your own. When deciding whether or not to work in groups, it is important to consider time. Is the time and effort of working in a group worth the outcome? Or, is it better to accomplish the task as an individual?

Technology and Social Media

Social media and technology are changing the ways we communicate in groups. There is no doubt that technology is rapidly changing the ways we communicate in a variety of contexts, and group communication is no exception. Many organizations use computers and cell phones as a primary way to keep groups connected given their ease of use, low cost, and asynchronous nature. In fact, it's likely that your course web pages also have "group forums" for class groups to deal with the complexities of finding times to meet. In fact, the group that worked on this chapter used Google Docs to have live chats online, transfer documents back and forth, and form messages to achieve the group's goals–all without ever having to meet in person. As you enter the workforce, you'll likely find yourself participating in virtual groups with people who have been brought together from a variety of geographical locations.

While communication technologies can be beneficial for bringing people together and facilitating groups, they also have drawbacks. When we lack face-to-face encounters, and rely on asynchronous forms of communication, there is greater potential for information to be lost and messages to be ambiguous. The face-to-face nature of traditional group meetings provides immediate processing and feedback through the interaction of group members. When groups communicate through email, threads, discussion forums, text messaging, etc., they lose the ability to provide immediate feedback to other members. Also, using communication technologies takes a great deal more time for a group to achieve its goals due to the asynchronous nature of these channels.

Nevertheless, technology is changing the ways we understand groups and participate in them. We have yet to work out all of the new standards for group participation introduced by technology. Used well, technology opens the door for new avenues of working in groups to achieve goals. Used poorly, technology can add to the many frustrations people often experience working in groups and teams.

Ultimately, a successful group must navigate the challenges of time constraints, technology, and conflict in order to move forward toward their stated goal. Successful groups are able to find the delicate balance between getting the job done and keeping the team together. Whether it is fostering enough task cohesion to meet a deadline or encouraging the "healthy friction" of substantive conflict to avoid the pitfalls of groupthink, these dynamics are the engine of collective success.

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8.4: Group Roles



Take a moment to think about the individuals in a particular group you were in and the role each of them played. You may recall that some people were extremely helpful, organized and made getting the job done easy. Others may have been more difficult to work with, or seemed to disrupt the group process. In each case, the participants were performing roles that manifest themselves in most groups. Early studies on group communication provide an overwhelming number of different types of group roles. To simplify, we provide an overview of some of the more common roles. As you study group roles, remember that we usually play more than one role at a time, and that we do not always play the same roles from group to group.

We organize group roles into four categories—task, social-emotional, procedural, and individual. **Task roles** are those that *help or hinder a group's ability to accomplish its goals*. **Social-emotional roles** are those that *focus on building and maintaining relationships among individuals in a group* (the focus is on how people feel about being in the group). **Procedural roles** are *concerned with how the group accomplishes its task*. People occupying these roles are interested in following directions, proper procedure, and going through appropriate channels when making decisions or initiating policy. The final category, **individual roles**, includes *any role "that detracts from group goals and emphasizes personal goals"* (Jensen & Chilberg 97). When people come to a group to promote their individual agenda above the group's agenda, they do not communicate in ways that are beneficial to the group. Let's take a look at each of these categories in more detail.

Task Roles

While there are many task roles a person can play in a group, we want to emphasize five common ones.

- **Task Leader** is *the person that keeps the group focused on the primary goal or task by setting agendas, controlling the participation and communication of the group's members, and evaluating ideas and contributions of participants*. Your associated students president probably performs the task leader role.
- **Information Gatherers** are those people who *seek and/or provide the factual information necessary for evaluating ideas, problem solving, and reaching conclusions*. This is the person who serves as the liaison with your professors about what they expect from a group project.
- **Opinion Gatherers** are those that *seek out and/or provide subjective responses about ideas and suggestions*. They most often take into account the values, beliefs, and attitudes of members. If you have a quiet member of your group, the opinion gatherer may ask, "What do you think?" in order to get that person's feedback.
- **Devil's Advocate** is the person that*argues a contrary or opposing point of view*. This may be done positively in an effort to ensure that all perspectives are considered, or negatively as the unwillingness of a single person to participate in the group's ideas.
- **Energizer** is the person who *functions as the group's cheer-leader, providing energy, motivation, and positive encouragement*.

Social-Emotional Roles

Group members play a variety of roles in order to **build and maintain relationships in groups.**

- **Social-Emotional Leader** is the person who is *concerned with maintaining and balancing the social and emotional needs of the group members and tends to play many, if not all, of the roles in this category*.
- **Encourager** practices good listening skills in order to *create a safe space for others to share ideas and offer suggestions*.
- **Followers** are group members that do what they are told, *going along with decisions and assignments from the group*.
- **Tension Releaser** is the person that *uses humor, or can skillfully change the subject in an attempt to minimize tension and avoid conflict*.
- **Compromiser** is the one who *mediates disagreements or conflicts among members by encouraging others to give in on small issues for the sake of meeting the goals of the group*.

Procedural Roles

Groups cannot function properly without having a system of rules or norms in place. Members are responsible for maintaining the norms of a group and play many roles to accomplish this.

- **Facilitator** acts like a traffic director by *managing the flow of information to keep the group on task*.
- **Gatekeepers** are those group members that attempt to *maintain proper communicative balance*. These people also serve as the points of contact between times of official group meetings.
- **Recorder** is the person responsible for *tracking group ideas, decisions, and progress*. Often, a written record is necessary, thus, this person has the responsibility for keeping, maintaining, and sharing group notes. If you're the person who pulls out a pen and paper in order to track what the group talks about, you're the recorder.

Individual Roles

Because groups are made of individuals, group members often play various roles in order to achieve individual goals.

- **Aggressor** engages in *forceful or dominating communication to put others down or initiate conflict with other members*. This communication style can cause some members to remain silent or passive.
- **Blocker** is the person that fusses or *complains about small procedural matters, often blocking the group's progress by not letting them get to the task*. They worry about small details that, overall, are not important to achieving the group's desired outcome.
- **Self-Confessor** uses the group as a setting to *discuss personal or emotional matters not relevant to the group or its task*. This is the person that views the group as one that is there to perform group therapy.
- **Playboy or Playgirl** *shows little interest in the group or the problem at hand* and does not contribute in a meaningful way, or at all. This is the person who does essentially no work, yet still gets credit for the group's work.
- **Joker or Clown** uses *inappropriate humor or remarks that can steer the group from its mission*.

While we certainly do not have the space to cover every role you might encounter in a group, we're sure you can point to your own examples of people who have filled the roles we've discussed. Perhaps you can point to examples of when you have filled some of these roles yourself. Important for group members to understand are the various roles they play in groups in order to engage in positive actions that help the group along.

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8.5: Leadership in Groups

While we've examined roles we can play in groups, the role that often gets the most attention is that of the leader. Like defining communication, many people have an idea of what a leader is, but can't really come up with a good definition for the term as there are many ways to conceptualize the role of leader. **Leadership** is one of the most studied aspects of group communication. Scholars in business, communication, psychology, and many other fields have written extensively about the qualities of leaders, theories of leadership, and how to build leadership skills. 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

Throughout human history, some people have grown into, taken, or been given positions as leaders. Many early leaders were believed to be divine in some way. In some indigenous cultures, shamans are considered leaders because they are believed to be bridges that can connect the spiritual and physical realms. Many early kings, queens, and military leaders were said to be approved by a god to lead the people. Today, many leaders are elected or appointed to positions of power, but most of them have already accumulated much experience in leadership roles. Some leaders are well respected, some are feared, some are hated, and many elicit some combination of these reactions. This brief overview illustrates the centrality of leadership throughout human history, but it wasn't until the last hundred years that leadership became an object of systematic study.

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. On the other hand, 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. We will now turn our attention to three common perspectives on why some people are more likely to be designated leaders than others and how leaders emerge in the absence of or in addition to a designated leader.



Figure 8.5.1: A group leader may be formally designated by someone inside or outside the group or may emerge naturally during early group meetings. New City Church – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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) 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. Interestingly, group members are not as likely to designate or recognize an emergent leader that they perceive to be exceedingly more intelligent than them. 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 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 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 their 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 8.5.2: A group leader with high communication competence can facilitate brainstorming and group discussion to enhance the creativity and quality of group members' ideas. 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. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the task-related functions of a group include the following (Cragan & Wright, 1991):

- Contributing ideas
- Seeking ideas
- Evaluating ideas
- Seeking idea evaluation
- Visualizing abstract ideas
- Generalizing from specific ideas

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. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the procedural functions of a group include the following (Cragan & Wright, 1991):

- Goal setting
- Agenda making
- Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Verbalizing consensus
- Generalizing from specific ideas

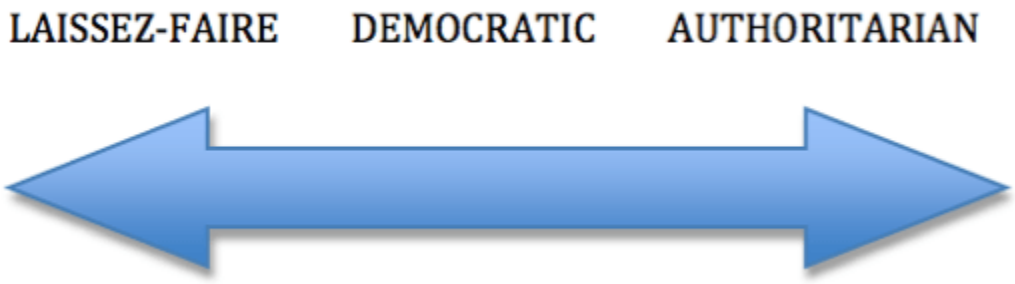
Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's **relational functions** include creating a participative and inclusive climate, establishing norms of reflection and self-analysis, and managing conflict. By encouraging participation among group members, a leader can help quell people who try to monopolize 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. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the relational functions of a group include the following (Cragan & Wright, 1991):

- Regulating participation
- Climate making
- Instigating group self-analysis
- Resolving conflict
- Instigating productive conflict

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). Let's visualize leadership styles by seeing them as a continuum. The position to the left (Laissez-faire) indicates a leader who exerts little to no control over a group, while the position on the right (Authoritarian) indicates a leader who seeks complete control. The position in the middle (Democratic) is one where a leader maintains a moderate level of control or influence in a group with the group's permission (Bass & Stogdill; Berkowitz).



- **Laissez-faire** is a French term that literally means "let do." This leadership style is one in which the leader *takes a laid back or hands-off approach*. For a variety of reasons, leaders may choose to keep their input at a minimum and refrain from directing a group. What do you think some reasons may be for selecting this leadership style? Perhaps a person feels uncomfortable being a leader. Perhaps a person does not feel that she/he possesses the skills required to successfully lead the group. Or, perhaps the group is highly skilled, motivated, and efficient and does not require much formal direction from a leader. If the latter is the case, then a laissez-faire approach may work well. However, if a group is in need of direction then a laissez-faire style may result in frustration and inefficiency.

- An **authoritarian leadership style** is one in which a leader attempts *to exert maximum control over a group*. This may be done by making unilateral decisions rather than consulting all members, assigning members to specific tasks or duties, and generally controlling group processes. This leadership style may be beneficial when a group is in need of direction or there are significant time pressures. Authoritarian leaders may help a group stay efficient and organized in order to accomplish its goals. However, group members may be less committed to the outcomes of the group process than if they had been a part of the decision making process. One term that you may have heard on your campus is "shared-governance." In general, faculty do not like working in groups where one person is making the decisions. Instead, most faculty prefer a system where all members of a group share in the leadership process. This can also be called the democratic style of leadership.

- The **democratic style of leadership** falls somewhere in the middle of laissez-faire and authoritarian styles. In these situations, *the decision-making power is shared among group members, not exercised by one individual*. In order for this to be effective, group members must spend considerable time sharing and listening to various positions and weighing the effects of each. Groups organized in this fashion may be more committed to the outcomes of the group, creative, and participatory. However, as each person's ideas are taken into account, this can extend the amount of time it takes for a group to accomplish its goals.

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. I choose to focus on this later model because 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 8.5.3: 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. US companies began to adopt a more participative and less directive style of management in the 1980s after organizational scholars researched teamwork and efficiency in Japanese corporations. Japanese managers included employees in decision making, which blurred

the line between the leader and other group members and enhanced productivity. These small groups were called quality circles, because they focused on group interaction intended to improve quality and productivity (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

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. As we will learn later, some group roles function to maintain the relational climate of the group, and several group members often perform these role behaviors. With a supportive leader as a model, such behaviors would likely be performed as part of established group norms, which can do much to enhance social cohesion. Supportive leaders do not provide unconditionally positive praise. They also competently provide constructive criticism in order to challenge and enhance group members' contributions.

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. Achievement-oriented leaders are likely less common than the other styles, as this style requires a high level of skill and commitment on the part of the leader and the group. Although rare, these leaders can be found at all levels of groups ranging from local school boards to *Fortune* 500 companies. Certain group dynamics must be in place in order to accommodate this leadership style. Groups for which an achievement-oriented leadership style would be effective are typically intentionally created and are made up of members who are skilled and competent in regards to the group's task. 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

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, they 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.



Figure 8.5.4: A group member with expertise in an area relevant to the group's task may draw on expert power to lead the group. For example, a transplant surgeon may lead a team of other doctors and nurses during the surgery while a critical care nurse may take the lead during postsurgery recovery. UCD School of Medicine – Surgery Image 2 – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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 they are well respected outside of the group for previous accomplishments or even because they are known as a dependable and capable group member. Like legitimate power, the fact that a person possesses referent power doesn't mean they have 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. When a group member is said to have "know how," they possess information power. The knowledge may not always be official, but it helps the group solve problems and get things done. Individuals develop information power through years of interacting with others, making connections, and building and maintaining interpersonal and instrumental relationships. 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 they give another group member positive feedback on an idea, an appreciation card for hard work, or a pat on the back. Because of limited resources, many leaders are frustrated by their inability to give worthwhile tangible rewards to group members such as prizes, bonuses, or raises. Additionally, the use of reward power may seem corny or paternalistic to some or may arouse accusations of favoritism or jealousy among group members who don't receive the award.

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). In many volunteer groups or groups that lack formal rules and procedures, leaders have a more difficult time using coercive power, since they can't issue official punishments. Instead, coercive power will likely take the form of interpersonal punishments such as ignoring group members or excluding them from group activities.

As we've already learned, leaders share traits, some more innate and naturally tapped into than others. Successful leaders also develop and refine leadership skills and behaviors that they are not "born with." Since much of leadership is skill- and behavior-based, it is never too early to start developing yourself as a leader. Whether you are planning to start your first career path fresh out of college, you've returned to college in order to switch career paths, or you're in college to help you advance more quickly in your current career path, you should have already been working on your leadership skills for years; it's not something you want to start your first day on the new job. Since leaders must be able to draw from a wealth of personal experience in order to solve problems, relate to others, and motivate others to achieve a task, you should start to seek out leadership positions in school and/or community groups. Since you may not yet be sure of your exact career path, try to get a variety of positions over a few years that are generally transferable to professional contexts. In these roles, work on building a reputation as an ethical leader and as a leader who takes responsibility rather than playing the "blame game." Leaders still have to be good team players and often have to take on roles and responsibilities that other group members do not want. Instead of complaining or expecting recognition for your "extra work," accept these responsibilities enthusiastically and be prepared for your hard work to go unnoticed. Much of what a good leader does occurs in the background and isn't publicly praised or acknowledged. Even when the group succeeds because of your hard work as the leader, you still have to be willing to share that praise with others who helped, because even though you may have worked the hardest, you didn't do it alone.

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8.6: Decision Making In Groups

Think about the last time you had to make a choice with a group of friends—maybe where to eat or which movie to see. It sounds simple, but the process likely involved a complex mix of personalities, cultural backgrounds, and power dynamics. In a professional or academic setting, these stakes are even higher. This chapter dives into the mechanics of how groups reach a "final answer," exploring a continuum of methods ranging from the total agreement of consensus to the efficiency of authority rule. We will examine how our individual values and cultural lenses shape our choices, and how to identify the situational factors—like urgency and resource access—that dictate which method is best. By understanding these dynamics, you will learn how to navigate the "tough decisions ahead" and ensure your group's process is as effective as its outcome.

Descision-making Methods

When groups need to get a job done they should have a method in place for making decisions. The decision making process is a norm that may be decided by a group leader or by the group members as a whole. Let's look at four common ways of making decisions in groups. To make it simple we will again use a continuum as a way to visualize the various options groups have for making decisions. On the left side are those methods that require maximum group involvement (consensus and voting). On the right are those methods that use the least amount of input from all members (compromise and authority rule).



Consensus

The decision-making process that requires the most group input is called **consensus**. To reach consensus *group members must participate in the crafting of a decision and agree to adopt it*. While not all members may support the decision equally, all will agree to carry it out. In individualistic cultures like the U.S., where a great deal of value is placed on independence and freedom of choice, this option can be seen by group members as desirable, since no one is forced to go along with a policy or plan of action to which they are opposed. Even though this style of decision making has many advantages, it has its limitations as well—it requires a great deal of creativity, trust, communication, and time on the part of all group members. When groups have a hard time reaching consensus, they may opt for the next strategy which does not require buy-in from all or most of the group.

Voting

Voting by majority may be as simple as having 51% of the vote for a particular decision, or may require a larger percentage, such as two-thirds or three-fourths, before reaching a decision. Like consensus, voting is advantageous because everyone is able to have an equal say in the decision process (as long as they vote). Unlike consensus, everyone may not be satisfied with the outcome. In a simple majority, 49% of voters may be displeased and may be resistant to abide by the majority vote. In this case

the decision or policy may be difficult to carry out and implement. For example, our campus recently had a department vote on whether or not they wanted to hire a particular person to be a professor. Three faculty voted yes for the person, while two faculty voted no. Needless to say, there was a fair amount of contention among the professors who voted. Ultimately, the person being considered for the job learned about the split vote and decided that he did not want to take the job because he felt that the two people that voted no would not treat him well.

Compromise

Toward the right of our continuum is **compromise**. This method often carries a positive connotation in the U.S. because it is perceived as fair since *each member gives up something, as well as gains something*. Nevertheless, this decision making process may not be as fair as it seems on the surface. The main reason for this has to do with what is being given up and obtained. There is nothing in a compromise that says these two factors must be equal (that may be the ideal, but it is often not the reality). For individuals or groups that feel they have gotten the unfair end of the bargain, they may be resentful and refuse to carry out the compromise. They may also foster ill will toward others in the group, or engage in self-doubt for going along with the compromise in the first place. However, if groups cannot make decisions through consensus or voting, compromise may be the next best alternative.

Authority Rule

At the far right of our continuum is decision by **authority rule**. This decision-making process *requires essentially no input from the group, although the group's participation may be necessary for implementing the decision*. The authority in question may be a member of the group who has more power than other members, such as the leader, or a person of power outside the group. While this method is obviously efficient, members are often resentful when they feel they have to follow another's orders and feel the group process was a façade and waste of valuable time.

During the decision making process, groups must be careful not to fall victim to groupthink. As discussed in our section on Group Dynamics, **groupthink** happens when *a group is so focused on agreement and consensus that they do not examine all of the potential solutions available to them*. Obviously, this can lead to incredibly flawed decision making and outcomes. Groupthink occurs when members strive for unanimity, resulting in self-deception, forced consent, and conformity to group values and ethics (Rose, Hopthrow & Crisp). Many people argue that groupthink is the reason behind some of history's worst decisions, such as the Bay of Pigs Invasion, The Pearl Harbor attack, The North Korea escalation, the Vietnam escalation, and the Bush administration's decision to go to war with Iraq (Rose, Hopthrow & Crisp). Let's think about groupthink on a smaller, less detrimental level. Imagine you are participating in a voting process during a group meeting where everyone votes yes on a particular subject, but you want to vote no. You might feel pressured to conform to the group and vote yes for the sole purpose of unanimity, even though it goes against your individual desires.

As with leadership styles, appropriate decision making processes vary from group to group depending on context, culture, and group members. There is not a "one way fits all" approach to making group decisions. When you find yourself in a task or decision-making group you should consider taking stock of the task at hand before deciding as a group the best ways to proceed.

Influences on Decision Making

Many factors influence the decision-making process. For example, how might a group's independence or access to resources affect the decisions they make? What potential advantages and disadvantages come with decisions made by groups that are more or less similar in terms of personality and cultural identities? In this section, we will explore how situational, personality, and cultural influences affect decision making in groups.

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. Access to archives, electronic databases, and individuals with relevant experience is necessary to obtain any relevant information about similar problems or to do research on a new or unique problem. In this regard, group members' formal and information network connections also become important situational influences.



The urgency of a decision can have a major influence on the decision-making process. As a situation becomes more urgent, it requires more specific decision-making methods and types of communication. Judith E. Bell – Urgent – CC BY-SA 2.0.

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 firehouse crew finds out that half of the building is contaminated with mold and must be closed down.
2. **Expectations change or increase.** Group members must innovate more efficient or effective ways of doing something. Example—a firehouse crew finds out that the district they are responsible for is being expanded.
3. **Something goes wrong and expectations change or increase.** Group members must fix/stop and become more efficient/effective. Example—the firehouse crew has to close half the building and must start responding to more calls due to the expanding district.
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—a firehouse crew has consistently had to work with minimal resources in terms of building space and firefighting tools.

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: Personality affects decision making. For example, "economic" decision makers decide based on what is practical and useful. 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 leads them to make rash decisions, resist group norms or decision-making structures, and switch often from task to relational 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 miscommunication and 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.

International Diversity in Group Interactions

Cultural value orientations such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and high-/low-context communication styles all manifest on a continuum of communication behaviors and can influence group decision making. Group members from

individualistic cultures are more likely to value task-oriented, efficient, and direct communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as dividing up tasks into individual projects before collaboration begins and then openly debating ideas during discussion and decision making. Additionally, people from cultures that value individualism are more likely to openly express dissent from a decision, essentially expressing their disagreement with the group. Group members from collectivistic cultures are more likely to value relationships over the task at hand. Because of this, they also tend to value conformity and face-saving (often indirect) communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as establishing norms that include periods of socializing to build relationships before task-oriented communication like negotiations begin or norms that limit public disagreement in favor of more indirect communication that doesn't challenge the face of other group members or the group's leader. In a group composed of people from a collectivistic culture, each member would likely play harmonizing roles, looking for signs of conflict and resolving them before they become public.

Power distance can also affect group interactions. Some cultures rank higher on power-distance scales, meaning they value hierarchy, make decisions based on status, and believe that people have a set place in society that is fairly unchangeable. Group members from high-power-distance cultures would likely appreciate a strong designated leader who exhibits a more directive leadership style and prefer groups in which members have clear and assigned roles. In a group that is homogenous in terms of having a high-power-distance orientation, members with higher status would be able to openly provide information, and those with lower status may not provide information unless a higher status member explicitly seeks it from them. Low-power-distance cultures do not place as much value and meaning on status and believe that all group members can participate in decision making. Group members from low-power-distance cultures would likely freely speak their mind during a group meeting and prefer a participative leadership style.

How much meaning is conveyed through the context surrounding verbal communication can also affect group communication. Some cultures have a high-context communication style in which much of the meaning in an interaction is conveyed through context such as nonverbal cues and silence. Group members from high-context cultures may avoid saying something directly, assuming that other group members will understand the intended meaning even if the message is indirect. So if someone disagrees with a proposed course of action, he or she may say, "Let's discuss this tomorrow," and mean, "I don't think we should do this." Such indirect communication is also a face-saving strategy that is common in collectivistic cultures. Other cultures have a low-context communication style that places more importance on the meaning conveyed through words than through context or nonverbal cues. Group members from low-context cultures often say what they mean and mean what they say. For example, if someone doesn't like an idea, they might say, "I think we should consider more options. This one doesn't seem like the best we can do."

In any of these cases, an individual from one culture operating in a group with people of a different cultural orientation could adapt to the expectations of the host culture, especially if that person possesses a high degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC). Additionally, people with high ICC can also adapt to a group member with a different cultural orientation than the host culture. Even though these cultural orientations connect to values that affect our communication in fairly consistent ways, individuals may exhibit different communication behaviors depending on their own individual communication style and the situation.

Domestic Diversity and Group Communication

While it is becoming more likely that we will interact in small groups with international diversity, we are guaranteed to interact in groups that are diverse in terms of the cultural identities found within a single country or the subcultures found within a larger cultural group.

Gender stereotypes sometimes influence the roles that people play within a group. For example, the stereotype that women are more nurturing than men may lead group members (both male and female) to expect that women will play the role of supporters or harmonizers within the group. Since women have primarily performed secretarial work since the 1900s, it may also be expected that women will play the role of recorder. In both of these cases, stereotypical notions of gender place women in roles that are typically not as valued in group communication. The opposite is true for men. In terms of leadership, despite notable exceptions, research shows that men fill an overwhelmingly disproportionate amount of leadership positions. We are socialized to see certain behaviors by men as indicative of leadership abilities, even though they may not be. For example, men are often perceived to contribute more to a group because they tend to speak first when asked a question or to fill a silence and are perceived to talk more about task-related matters than relationally oriented matters. Both of these tendencies create a perception that men are more engaged with the task. Men are also socialized to be more competitive and self-congratulatory, meaning that their communication may be seen as dedicated and their behaviors seen as powerful, and that when their work isn't noticed they will be more likely to make it known to the group rather than take silent credit. Even though we know that the relational elements of a group are crucial for success, even in high-performance teams, that work is not as valued in our society as the task-related work.

Despite the fact that some communication patterns and behaviors related to our typical (and stereotypical) gender socialization affect how we interact in and form perceptions of others in groups, the differences in group communication that used to be attributed to gender in early group communication research seem to be diminishing. This is likely due to the changing organizational cultures from which much group work emerges, which have now had more than sixty years to adjust to women in the workplace. It is also due to a more nuanced understanding of gender-based research, which doesn't take a stereotypical view from the beginning as many of the early male researchers did. Now, instead of biological sex being assumed as a factor that creates inherent communication differences, group communication scholars see that men and women both exhibit a range of behaviors that are more or less feminine or masculine. It is these gendered behaviors, and not a person's gender, that seem to have more of an influence on perceptions of group communication. Interestingly, group interactions are still masculinist in that male and female group members prefer a more masculine communication style for task leaders and that both males and females in this role are more likely to adapt to a more masculine communication style. Conversely, men who take on social-emotional leadership behaviors adopt a more feminine communication style. In short, it seems that although masculine communication traits are more often associated with high status positions in groups, both men and women adapt to this expectation and are evaluated similarly (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999).

Other demographic categories are also influential in group communication and decision making. In general, group members have an easier time communicating when they are more similar than different in terms of race and age. This ease of communication can make group work more efficient, but the homogeneity may sacrifice some creativity. As we learned earlier, groups that are diverse (e.g., they have members of different races and generations) benefit from the diversity of perspectives in terms of the quality of decision making and creativity of output.

In terms of age, for the first time since industrialization began, it is common to have three generations of people (and sometimes four) working side by side in an organizational setting. Although four generations often worked together in early factories, they were segregated based on their age group, and a hierarchy existed with older workers at the top and younger workers at the bottom. Today, however, generations interact regularly, and it is not uncommon for an older person to have a leader or supervisor who is younger than him or her (Allen, 2011).

The benefits and challenges that come with diversity of group members are important to consider. Since we will all work in diverse groups, we should be prepared to address potential challenges in order to reap the benefits. Diverse groups may be wise to coordinate social interactions outside of group time in order to find common ground that can help facilitate interaction and increase group cohesion. We should be sensitive but not let sensitivity create fear of "doing something wrong" that then prevents us from having meaningful interactions. Reviewing Chapter 7 "Intercultural Communication" will give you useful knowledge to help you navigate both international and domestic diversity and increase your communication competence in small groups and elsewhere.

Ultimately, there is no "one way fits all" approach to group decision-making. The most effective groups are those that can consider their resources, the urgency of the task, and the diverse perspectives of their members before choosing a path forward. Whether you are navigating a high-stakes crisis or a mundane office task, your awareness of personality types and cultural contexts will be your greatest asset. By fostering an environment that values diverse input and remains vigilant against the pressures of groupthink, you can ensure that your group's decisions are not just efficient, but also creative and sustainable.

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8.7: Chapter 8 Summary

Group Communication Review

Big Idea

- Group communication is an agreed-upon and rule-governed system of interaction among 3 to 12 individuals. It is the engine of professional success, social change, and personal growth, allowing us to achieve "synergy"—where the collective result is greater than the sum of individual efforts.

Foundations of Groups and Teams

- Definition of a Group: A collection of 3 to 12 individuals who interact about a common problem or interdependent goal and exert mutual influence.
- Group vs. Team: A team is a specialized group with a strong sense of belonging, highly specialized roles, and a collective identity (e.g., a surgical team or a football team).
- Five Key Characteristics:
  1. Interdependence: Members rely on each other; if one fails, the goal is at risk.
  2. Purposeful Interaction: Communication is goal-oriented (problem-solving, trust-building).
  3. Synergy: Achieving more together than would be possible alone.
  4. Common Goals: The shared "why" that brings the group together.
  5. Cohesiveness: The "social glue" or sense of wholeness felt by members.

Forming Groups

- Why We Join:
  - Interests/Attraction: Shared hobbies or goals.
  - Drive Reduction: Meeting Maslow's needs (security, belonging, esteem).
  - Reinforcement: Seeking social rewards and support.
- Tuckman's Five Stages:
  1. Forming: Politeness, orientation, and establishing initial norms.
  2. Storming: The "first fight"; conflict over goals and participation.
  3. Norming: Solidifying rules and values; increasing cohesion.
  4. Performing: High task focus; the group works efficiently.
  5. Terminating: Disbanding after the task is complete.

Group Dynamics and Conflict

- Group Climate: The enduring tone of the group.
  - Task Cohesion: Commitment to the job.
  - Social Cohesion: Liking and attraction among members.
- Groupthink: A negative phenomenon where high pressure for conformity leads to a lack of critical evaluation.
  - *Symptoms:* Invulnerability, illusion of morality, and illusion of unanimity.
- Three Types of Conflict:
  - Procedural: Disagreement over *how* (mechanics/rules).
  - Substantive: Disagreement over *what* (ideas/goals).
  - Interpersonal: Disagreement over *who* (personality clashes).

Roles and Leadership

- Role Categories:
  - Task Roles: Focus on the goal (e.g., Task Leader, Information Gatherer).

    - Social-Emotional: Focus on relationships (e.g., Harmonizer, Compromiser).
    - Procedural: Focus on the system (e.g., Gatekeeper, Recorder).
    - Individual: Detract from goals (e.g., Aggressor, Blocker, Joker).
- Leadership Power: Legitimate (title), Expert (knowledge), Referent (likability), Information (access), and Reward/Coercive (incentives/punishment).
- Leadership Styles: Directive (structure), Participative (inclusive), Supportive (relational), and Achievement-Oriented (excellence).

Decision Making

- The Decision Continuum:
    - Consensus: Everyone participates and agrees to support the choice.
    - Voting: Majority rule; efficient but can leave a minority resentful.
    - Compromise: Everyone gives up something to gain something.
    - Authority Rule: Leader decides with little to no group input.
- Cultural Influences:

  Context: High-context (indirect/nonverbal) vs. Low-context (direct/verbal).

    - Individualism vs. Collectivism: Task-focus vs. Relationship-focus.
    - Power Distance: High (valuing hierarchy) vs. Low (valuing equality).

Quick Self-Test

1. Define a “group” in this course. What two features must be present?
2. Put Tuckman’s stages in order: Performing, Forming, Norming, Storming, Terminating.
3. Match each conflict type to its focus: Procedural (how), Substantive (what), Interpersonal (who).
4. Name two warning signs of Groupthink and one tactic to prevent it.
5. Choose the best decision method for each scenario (Consensus, Voting, Compromise, Authority Rule):
   a) 24-hour deadline, high urgency, clear leader in place
   b) Long-term policy everyone must implement and support
   c) Moderate time, polarized views, need a quick tie-breaker

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9: ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

9.1: Organizational Communication Overview
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9.1: Organizational Communication Overview

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define organizational communication
- Trace the historical evolution of organizational theory from the Classical Management to the Human Relations, Human Resources, and Systems perspectives.
- Identify the three levels of organizational culture—artifacts, values, and basic assumptions—and explain how they shape the overall communication climate.
- Categorize the four types of organizations (Mutual Benefit, Business Concerns, Service, and Commonweal).
- Analyze ethical and practical challenges in the modern workplace.

If you have ever worked a job, volunteered for a non-profit, or belonged to a social organization, you have experienced organizational communication. It's likely that you've been a job seeker, an interviewee, a new employee, a co-worker, or maybe a manager? In each of these situations you make various choices regarding how you choose to communicate with others in an organizational context.

We participate in organizations in almost every aspect of our lives. In fact, you will spend the bulk of your waking life in the context of organizations (March & Simon), which means you'll spend more time with your co-workers than your family! At the center of every organization is what we've been studying throughout this book – Communication. Organizational communication is a broad and ever-growing specialization in the field of Communication. For the purpose of this chapter, we will provide a brief overview of the field, highlighting what organizational communication is and how it is studied.

A 2010 survey from the U.S. Department of Labor found that the average employed person working in the United States averages 7.5 hours of work per day (7.9 hours on the week days; 5.5 hours on the weekend). This study further noted that these are just the hours a person spends in a traditional working environment. People further spend about 36 minutes a week interacting with an educational organization, about 43 minutes shopping, and about 16 minutes attending religious services or volunteering. When people traditionally hear the word "organization" they most often jump right to the idea of a workplace.As you can see, an organization is a much broader term than just someone's workplace.

This chapter looks at organizational communication as a broad term that encompasses a wide array of organizational types, which we'll explore in more detail elsewhere in this chapter. Even if you just take the average 7.5 hours per day an individual spends "working" in an organization, you will end up in an organizational environment a little over 111 days per year. If you work for 40 years, you'll basically spend 12 of those years at work. Hence the importance of knowing how to interact and behave in organizations.

What Is An Organization?

Before we define organizational communication let's look at what an organization is, and how pervasive they are in today's society. Etzioni states, "We are born in organizations, educated by organizations, and most of us spend much of our lives working for organizations" (1). Simply put, from birth to death, organizations impact every aspect of our lives (Deetz).

Stephen P. Robbins defines an **organization** as a *"consciously coordinated social unit composed of two or more people, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals"* (4). Why have organizations in the first place? We organize together for common social, personal, political, or professional purposes. We organize together to achieve what we cannot accomplish individually.

Organizations are complicated, dynamic organisms that take on a personality and culture of their own, with unique rules, hierarchies, structures, and divisions of labor. Organizations can be thought of as systems of people (Goldhaber) who are in constant motion (Redding). Organizations are social systems (Thayer; Katz & Kahn) that rely on communication to exist. Simon puts it quite simply: "Without communication, there can be no organization" (Simon 57).

What is Organizational Communication?

We define **organizational communication** *as the sending and receiving of messages among interrelated individuals within a particular environment or setting to achieve individual and common goals.* Organizational communication is highly contextual and culturally dependent. Individuals in organizations transmit messages through face-to face, written, and mediated channels. Organizational communication helps us to

1. accomplish tasks relating to specific roles and responsibilities of sales, services, and production
2. acclimate to changes through individual and organizational creativity and adaptation
3. complete tasks through the maintenance of policy, procedures, or regulations that support daily and continuous operations
4. develop relationships where "human messages are directed at people within the organization-their attitudes, morale, satisfaction, and fulfillment" (Goldhaber 20)
5. coordinate, plan, and control the operations of the organization through management (Katz & Kahn; Redding; Thayer).

Organizational communication is how organizations represent, present, and constitute their organizational climate and culture—the attitudes, values and goals that characterize the organization and its members.

Organizational communication largely focuses on building relationships and interacting with with internal organizational members and interested external publics. We have two ways of looking at organizational communication. The conventional approach focuses on communication within organizations. The second approach is communication as organization — meaning organizations are a result of the communication of those within them. Communication is not just about transmitting messages between senders and receivers. Communication literally constitutes, or makes up, our social world. Much of our communication involves sending and receiving relatively unproblematic messages and acting on that information. Other times things are a bit more complex, such as when you need to resolve conflict with a close friend or family member. There is much more going on in these situations then merely exchanging information. You are actually engaging in a complex process of meaning and negotiating rules created by the people involved.

For organizations to be successful, they must have competent communicators. Organizational communication studies show that organizations rely on effective and efficient communication skills from their members. A number of surveys (Davis & Miller; Holter & Kopka; Perrigo & Gaut) identify effective oral and written communication as the most sought after skills by those who run organizations. The U.S. Department of Labor reported communication competency as the most vital skill necessary for the 21st century workforce to achieve organizational success (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills). **The Public Forum Institute** maintained that employees need to be skilled in public presentation, listening, and interpersonal communication to flourish in an organization.

Organizations seek people who can follow and give instructions, accurately listen, provide useful feedback, get along with coworkers and customers, network, provide serviceable information, work well in teams, and creatively and critically solve problems and present ideas in an understandable manner. Developing organizational communication awareness and effectiveness is more than just having know-how or knowledge. Efficient organizational communication involves knowing how to create and exchange information, work with diverse groups or individuals, communicate in complicated and changing circumstances, as well as having the aptitude or motivation to communicate in appropriate manners.

The Field of Organizational Communication

As you now know, communication study is deeply entrenched in the oral rhetorical traditions of ancient Rome and Greece. Similar to the many of the early concepts that shaped the discipline, some of the founding principles of organizational communication originated in the East. As early as the fourth century, Chinese scholars concentrated on the "problems of communicating within the vast government bureaucracy as well as between the government and the people" (Murphy, Hildebrandt & Thomas 4). Ancient eastern scholars focused on information flow, message fidelity, and quality of information within their governmental bureaucracy (Krone, Garrett & Chen; Paraboteeah). These still remain areas of focus for organizational communication that you will learn in your classes today.

Like most of our field's specializations, organizational communication began in the mid 20th century with the work of P. E. Lull and W. Charles Redding at the University of Purdue (Putnam & Cheney). During the industrial age, the focus of organizational communication was on worker productivity, organizational structure, and overall organizational effectiveness. Through this work people were interested in higher profits and managerial efficiency. Follett is often referred to as the first management consultant in the United States (Stohl). She focused specifically on message complexity, appropriate channel choice, and worker

participation in organizations. Bernard placed communication at the heart of every organizational process, arguing that people must be able to interact with each other for an organization to succeed.

As communication evolves, research continues to develop, and organizational communication continues to redefine itself. In the early stages, this area focused on leaders giving public presentations. More recently emphasis has focused on all levels of interaction in organizations. Because interpersonal relationships are a large part of organizational communication, a great deal of research focuses on how interpersonal relationships are conducted within the framework of organizational hierarchies.

Modern organizational communication research has been summarized into eight major traditions: *1) Communication channels, 2) Communication climate, 3) Network analysis, 4) Superior-subordinate communication, 5) the information-processing perspective, 6) the rhetorical perspective, 7) the cultural perspective, and 8) the political perspective* (Putnam and Cheney; Kim) Since the 1980s, this specialization has expanded to include work on organizational culture, power and conflict management, and organizational rhetoric. If you were to take an organizational communication course at your campus, much of the time would be spent focusing on developing your skills in organizational socialization, interviewing, giving individual and group presentations, creating positive work relationships, performance evaluation, conflict resolution, stress management, decision making, and communicating with external publics.

When we study organizational communication we can look to quantitative methods to predict behaviors, or qualitative methods to understand behaviors. We can use qualitative methods to study communication in the natural environment of organizations in order to understand organizational cultures and how they function (Putnam & Cheney; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo; Kim).

Critical approaches view organizations as "sites of domination" (Miller 116) where certain individuals are marginalized or disadvantaged by oppressive groups or structures. Most often the focus of this line of research involves gender or ethnic identity as they manifest themselves in organizations. The critical researcher uses interpretative research techniques similar to cultural studies. When looking at something such as a company pamphlet or the organization's employee handbook, a critical researcher will expose political messages that may disadvantage particular groups of people.

Types of Organizations

The last factor in understanding organizations is to realize that there are numerous types of organizations.

Mutual Benefit Associations

The first type of organization that exists is the mutual benefit organization, which is focused on providing for its membership. Some examples are "political parties, unions, fraternal associations, clubs, veterans' organizations, professional associations, and religious sects" (Blau & Scott, 1962, p.45). People generally join these types of organizations because of the benefits of membership. When these organizations are first being created, organizational members are generally very involved in the creation of the organization. However, once one of these organizations has been around for a while, the majority of the members become passive and let the minority run the organization.

Business Concerns

The second type of organization is the business concerns organization, which is focused on doing well for the organization itself. According to Blau and Scott (1962), the "dominant problem of business concerns is that of operating efficiency—the achievement of maximum gain at minimum cost in order to further survival and growth in competition with other organizations" (p. 49). Most for-profit organizations will fall into the business concerns organization. Business concerns organizations are faced with problems associated with being efficient and profit-focused. Because of the need to cut costs and maintain a competitive advantage, these organizations are often cold and calloused in how they treat their members and customers.

Service Organizations

Service organizations' prime concern is providing products or services for a specific public clientele. Service organizations can include "social-work agencies, hospitals, schools, legal aid societies, and mental health clinics" (Blau & Scott, 1962, p. 51). The basic problem service organizations face tend to be problems of beaurocracy. Often service organizations are steeped in organizational hierarchies and procedures that prohibit providing the easiest and fastest service to potential clients.

Commonweal Organizations

The last type of organization discussed by Blau and Scott are commonweal organizations designed to benefit society at large. Some examples of commonweal organizations include “the State Department, the Bureau of Internal Revenue, military services, police and fire departments, and also the research function as distinguished from the teaching function in universities" (Blau & Scott, 1962, p. 54). All of these organizations were created because they represented areas where the general public needed some level of protection or knowledge, or the organization serves administrative purposes of the government.

Organizational communication is far more than the memos, meetings, and emails that fill our workdays—it is the very foundation upon which every successful organization is built. From the ancient bureaucracies of the Eastern and Western worlds to the complex, multicultural workplaces of the 21st century, the ability to communicate effectively has always been the defining skill that separates thriving organizations from failing ones. Whether you view communication as a tool *within* organizations or as the very force that *constitutes* them, one truth remains constant: organizations rise and fall on the strength of their communication. As you move forward in your academic and professional journey, recognize that every role you step into—whether as a new employee, a co-worker, or a future leader—is an opportunity to shape the climate, culture, and direction of the organizations you serve. The study of organizational communication is, ultimately, the study of human connection at its most consequential scale, and mastering it may be the single most powerful investment you make in your career.

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9.2: Historical Perspective

Imagine walking into a workplace where you are treated not as a person, but as a replaceable cog in a massive, unfeeling machine. For much of the early 20th century, this wasn't just a metaphor—it was the "Scientific Management" gold standard. This section explores the fascinating evolution of organizational communication, tracing our journey from the rigid, stopwatch-timed efficiency of the Industrial Age to the modern, complex "Systems" and "Cultural" perspectives we see today. By understanding these historical shifts, you will gain a clearer picture of why your current workplace—or even your college campus—operates the way it does, and how the way we talk to one another defines the very soul of an organization.

Classical Management Perspective

The original perspective for understanding organizational communication can be described using a machine metaphor. At the beginning of the industrial age, when people thought science could solve almost every problem, American Frederick Taylor, Frenchman Henri Fayol, and German Max Weber tried to apply scientific solutions to organizations. They wanted to determine how organizations and workers could function in an ideal way. Organizations during the industrial revolution wanted to know how they could maximize their profits so the classical management perspective focused on worker productivity.

The machine metaphor of classical management suggests that three basic aspects should exist in organizations: Specialization, Standardization, and Predictability (Miller). Those who advocated this perspective argued that every employee should have a specialized function, thus, essentially any individual could perform a job if they are properly trained. If one individual fails to do the job, they are easily replaceable with another person since people are seen as simply parts of a machine.

The story of McDonalds is a case in point: After running a restaurant successfully for 11 years, Richard and Maurice McDonald decided to improve it. They wanted to make food faster, sell it cheaper and spend less time worrying about replacing cooks and car hops. The brothers closed the restaurant and redesigned its food-preparation area to work less like a restaurant and more like an automobile assembly line. Their old drive-in had already made them rich, but the new restaurant – which became McDonald's – made the brothers famous. Restaurateurs traveled from all over the country to copy their system of fast food preparation, which they called the Speedee Service System. Without cars, Carl and Maurice would not have had a drive-in restaurant to tinker with. Without assembly lines, they would not have had a basis for their method of preparing food. Being a short-order cook took skill and training, and good cooks were in high demand. The Speedee system, however, was completely different. Instead of using a skilled cook to make food quickly, it used lots of unskilled workers, each of whom did one small, specific step in the food-preparation process. Instead of being designed to facilitate the preparation of a variety of food relatively quickly, the kitchen's purpose was to make a very large amount of a very few items.



Owners Richard and Maurice McDonald

Taylor developed his **Theory of Scientific Management** from his early days as a foreman in a machine shop. Little did he know how drastically he was going to influence organizations and our notions of working life. Taylor could not understand why organizations and individuals would not want to maximize efficiency. In Copley's biography about Taylor he reveals a man who was driven by perfection: "The spectacle of a [man] doing less than [his] best was to him morally shocking. He enthusiastically believed that to do anything less than your best is to add to the sum of the world's unrighteousness" (207). However, workers were not always as enthusiastic about efficiency and quality as Taylor, especially given the significant difference in status and pay between management and labor. For the common laborer during the industrial revolution, this new approach to employment

meant possibly losing your job if a “scientific” formula showed that fewer workers could do the same job. If you don’t think this is alive today, think about organizations such as Apple that have employees overseas manufacture iPhones.

In today’s world, fast food chains are good examples of classical management. Next time you buy that Whopper or Big Mac, you can thank the influence of American businessman Frederick Taylor. Literally using a stopwatch, Taylor’s used his time and motion studies to prove that for every job, there is one best way to perform it in the shortest amount of time. This meant properly selecting, training, and rewarding the appropriate worker with the right task (Taylor, 1947). Peek into the kitchen the next time you order that burger, fries, and coke. It is likely that you will see employees separated by station and task, doing their specific part to fulfill your order. Likewise, the design of hard plastic seats and bright colors in fast food restaurants is done with intention to get customers in and out of the restaurant in an efficient and expedient manner.



During this time, Weber was also developing his ideas about **bureaucracy**. He was fascinated with what the ideal organization should look like, and believed that effective hierarchies helped organizations operate effectively. *Precise rules, a division of labor, centralized authority, and a distinctly defined hierarchy should be driven by rational thought void of emotion and outside influence* (Weber). These qualities would allow organizations to operate in a somewhat predictable manner — employees knew what to expect and who was in charge, and management could make decisions based on familiar, relevant information rather than irrational feelings. Think about the bureaucracy of your college campus, there are numerous divisions of labor, rules, policies, and procedures. Registering for classes, tracking transcripts, obtaining financial aid, living in campus housing, are all part of the time you spend navigating the bureaucracy on your campus. Imagine a campus without bureaucracy. What if you couldn’t easily access your transcripts? What if no one kept track of your progress through college? How would you know what to do and when you were done? What if there was no process for applying for financial aid? While bureaucracies can be slow, tedious, and often inefficient, they provide structure we have come to rely on to accomplish personal and professional goals.

Fayol’s theory of classical management focused on how management worked, specifically looking at what managers should do to be most effective. For Fayol, organizational members should be clear who is in charge, and everyone should know their role in an organization. He argued that organizations should be grouped in a precise hierarchy that limits the flow of communication to top-down communication.

Theory X is an example of a classical management theory where *managers micro-manage employees by using reward-punishment tactics, and limiting employee participation in decision-making* (McGregor). This theory sees employees as basically lazy or unmotivated. Because of this, managers must closely supervise their workers. Those that do not do their work are disposable parts of the machine. This allows for management to mistreat and abuse their employees, ultimately lowering the very thing they were after, greater productivity.

Organizations using this approach can still be found today. Have you ever had a boss or manager who treated you like an interchangeable part of a machine who had little value? If so, you’ve experienced aspects of the classical management perspective at work. While scientific approaches to organizations were an interesting starting point for determining how to communicate, the classical management approach fell short in many ways. Thus, development and refinement continued to occur regarding ways to understand organizational communication.

Human Relations Perspective

Because classical management was so mechanical and did not treat people as humans, organizational scholars wanted to focus

on the human elements of organizations. The **human relations approach** focuses on how *organizational members relate to one another, and how individuals' needs influence their performance in organizations*. In 1924 Elton Mayo and his team of Harvard scientists began a series of studies that were initially interested in how to modify working conditions to increase worker productivity, decrease employee turnover, and change the overall poor organizational effectiveness at the Hawthorne Electric Plant near Chicago (Roethlisberger & Dickson).

Mayo's team discovered that, no matter what changes they made to the work environment (such as adjusting lighting and temperature levels, work schedules, and worker isolation), worker productivity increased simply due to the fact that researchers were paying attention to them. Simply paying attention to workers and addressing their social needs yielded significant changes in their productivity. This is where the term "The Hawthorne Effect" developed. Mayo's work provided an impetus for a new way of looking at workers in organizations.

Maslow's hierarchy suggests that human beings are actually motivated to satisfy their personal needs. His theory is still of interest to us today as we try to comprehend the relevance of human relations in the workplace. Papa et al. (2007) describe McGregor's contributions: "As management theorists became familiar with Maslow's work, they soon realized the possibility of connecting higher-level needs to worker motivation. If organizational goals and individual needs could be integrated so that people would acquire self-esteem and, ultimately, self-actualization through work, then motivation would be self-sustaining" (p. 33). Remember that Theory X managers do not trust their employees because they think workers are inherently unmotivated and lazy. At the other end of the managerial spectrum, **Theory Y** managers (those that take a human relations perspective to employees) *assume that workers are self motivated, seek responsibility, and want to achieve success*. As a result of this changing perspective, managers began to invite feedback and encourage a degree of participation in organizational decision making, thus focusing on human relationships as a way to motivate employee productivity. Today many companies make employees happy by keeping them well rested and supplying them with ways to catch up on sleep even at work.

Human Resources Perspective

The Human Resources perspective picks up where human relations left off. The primary criticism of human relations was that it still focused on productivity, trying to achieve worker productivity simply by making workers happy. The idea that a happy employee would be a productive employee makes initial sense. However, happiness does not mean that we will be productive workers. As a matter of fact, an individual can be happy with a job and not work very hard. Another reason scholars tried to improve the human relations perspective was because manipulative managers misused it by inviting participation from employees on the surface, but not really doing anything with the employees' contributions. Imagine your boss encouraging everyone to put their ideas into a suggestion box but never looking them. How would you feel?

Human Resources attempts to truly embrace participation by all organizational members, viewing each person as a valuable human resource. *Employees are valuable resources that should be fully involved to manifest their abilities and productivity*. Using this approach, organizations began to encourage employee participation in decision making.

An example of the human resources perspective is William Ouchi's **Theory Z**. Ouchi believed that traditional American organizations should be more like Japanese organizations. Japanese culture *values lifetime employment, teamwork, collective responsibility, and a sound mind and body*. This contrasts with many American work values such as short-term employment, individualism, and non-participation. Many U.S. companies implemented Japanese organizational concepts such as quality circles (QC), quality of work life (QWL) programs, management by objectives (MBO), and W. E. Deming's notion of total quality management (TQM). Each of these approaches was designed to flatten hierarchies, increase participation, implement quality control, and utilize teamwork. Human Resources works "by getting organizational participants meaningfully involved in the important decisions that regulate the enterprise" (Brady 15).

Systems Perspective

Collectively, individuals in organizations achieve more than they can independently (Barnard; Katz & Kahn; Redding; von Bertalanffy; Skyttner). The **systems perspective** for understanding organizations is *"concerned with problems of relationships, of structure, and of interdependence rather than with the constant attributes of objects"* (Katz & Kahn 18). An organization is like a living organism and must exist in its external environment in order to survive. Without this interaction an organization remains what we call closed, and withers away (Buckley).

All organizations have basic properties. **Equifinality** means that *a system (organization) can reach its goals from different paths*. Each professor that teaches public speaking, for example, does so in a different way but, the end result is that the students in each

of the classes have gained some level of competency as public speakers. **Negative entropy** is *the ability of an organization to overcome the possibility of becoming run down*. Companies like Apple do everything they can to stay ahead of their competition and keep their products ahead of the curve. **Requisite variety** means that *organizations must be responsive to their external environment and adjust when needed*. Apple is always under pressure to come up with the newest and best technology. When Apple goes a long time without doing so, the public begins to be critical. **Homeostasis** points to *an organization's need for stability in a turbulent environment*. When gas prices go up, for example, organizations impacted by these rising costs take steps to ensure their survival and profitability. **Complexity** states that *the more an organization grows and interacts, the more elaborate it becomes* (Katz & Kahn; von Bertalanffy; Miller). Think about how huge companies such as Verizon must have elaborate organizational systems in place to deal with all of its employees and customers in a competitive market place.

If an organization is a system, how do we use the role of communication to analyze interactions among organizational members? Karl Weick's **Theory of Organizing** suggests that *participants organize through their communication and make sense of unpredictable environments through interactions*. Simply put, organizations exist as a result of the interactions of people in those organizations. An organization is more than just a physical building with people inside. Communication is the "process of organizing" implying that communication actually is the organization (Eisenberg & Goodall). Regardless of whether the focus is on the message or the meaning, systems theory stresses the interdependence of integrated people in organizations and the outcomes they produce as a result of their interactions.

Cultural Perspective

Each organization has unique characteristics and cultural differences such as language, traditions, symbols, practices, past-times, and social conveniences that distinguish it from other organizations. Likewise, they are rich with their own histories, stories, customs, and social norms.



Fast food restaurants such as In-and-Out and Chipotle have a culture of serving high quality food at a fast rate, yet they are very different organizations. Chipotle's company motto is "good food is good buisness" (Chipotle.com). We can understand organizations by seeing them as unique cultures.

Simply put, the **cultural perspective** states that *organizations maintain: 1) Shared values and beliefs, 2) Common practices, skills, and actions, 3) Customarily observed rules, 4) Objects and artifacts, and 5) Mutually understood meanings*. Shockley-Zalabak contends, "Organizational culture reflects the shared realities and shared practices in the organization and how these realities create and shape organizational events" (63). Not every individual in an organization shares, supports, or engages in organizational values, beliefs, or rules in a similar manner. Instead, organizational culture includes various perspectives in a continually changing, emerging, and complex environment.

Some people try to treat culture as a "thing." However, organizational cultures emerge through interaction. Members share meaning, construct reality, and make sense of their environment on an ongoing basis. As Morgan states, "There is often more to culture than meets the eye and our understandings are usually much more fragmented and superficial than the reality itself" (151).

When we become involved with organizations, we learn from other people in the organization "the correct way to perceive, think, and feel" (Schein, 2010, p. 12). There are three interdependent levels that provide insight into how culture works in organizations.

- **Artifacts** are the first type of communicative behavior we encounter in organizations. Artifacts are *symbols used by an organization to represent the organization's culture*. You might observe artifacts such as office technology, office architecture and arrangement, lighting, artwork, written documents, personal items on desks, clothing preferences, personal appearance, name tags, security badges, policy handbook, or web sites. You might observe routine behavior such as work processes, patterned communication (greetings), non-verbal characteristics (eye contact and handshakes) rituals, ceremonies, stories, or informal/formal interactions between supervisor and subordinate. All of these are artifacts that tell us something about an organization's cultural values and practices. What artifacts represent the college or university you are attending right now?

- **Values** are an *organization's preference for how things should happen, or strategies for determining how things should be accomplished correctly*. Hackman and Johnson (2000) believe that values "serve as the yardstick for judging behavior" (p. 33). Many times there is a disconnect between what an organization says it values, and their actual behavior. Disney espouses family values, for example, yet many of their subsidiary companies produce media that do not hold up these values. A way around this for Disney is to make sure to use other names, such as Touchstone Pictures, so that the Disney name is not attached to anything antithetical to "family values."

- **Basic assumptions** are the core of what individuals believe in organizations. These *"unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings" ultimately influence how you experience the world as an organizational member* (Schein, 2010, p. 24). Unspoken beliefs reveal how we treat other individuals, what we see as good and bad in human nature, how we discover truth, and our place in the environment (Hackman & Johnson (2000); Burtscher (2014). Basic assumptions guide how organizations treat employees and provide services to customers. Imagine that you work overtime almost everyday without pay. Why would you do this? Maybe you hold the basic assumption that people who work hard ultimately get ahead by being given promotions and pay raises. Imagine if you did this for years with no recognition or acknowledgement. What does that say about your basic assumptions in comparison to those of the organization?

Looking at organizations from the cultural perspective began in the 1980s (Putnam & Kim). During this time, several popular books focused on ideal corporate cultures, and the cultural perspective became a hot topic. Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life (Deal & Kennedy) and In Search of Excellence (Peters & Waterman) described cultural elements that mark prosperous organizations. The authors talked with Fortune 500 companies and determined that if an organization demonstrates a bias for action, has a close relationship with customers, has identifiable values, reveres individuals that exemplifies organizational values (heroes), and has a solid communication network, it is a healthy organization.

Culture is complicated and unstable. Each organization has its own unique identity, its own distinct ways of doing things, and its own ways of performing culture (Pacanowsky & O 'Donnell-Trujillo). The books mentioned above prompted many organizations to try to replicate the companies with "strong" or "excellent" cultures. Ironically, several of the companies identified with strong or excellent cultures have had a difficult time maintaining productivity over the last twenty years.

An important focal point of the cultural perspective is the climate of an organization. **Climate** is *the general workplace atmosphere or mood experienced by organizational members* (Tagiuri; Green). Organizational climate is a "subjective reaction to organization members' perception of communication events" (Shockley-Zalabak 66). Do you like working with the people at your job? Are you satisfied with the general climate of your college campus? Are you appropriately rewarded for the work you do? Do you feel like a valued member of your church or social group? Climate has a direct effect on organizational relationships and members' satisfaction and morale. Researcher Jack Gibb proposes that the interpersonal communication in organizational relationships, especially between superiors and subordinates, contributes to the overall climate of organizations. Gibb identifies a continuum of climate characteristics ranging from supportive to defensive behaviors that lead to member satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Ultimately, the history of organizational communication teaches us that there is no "one-size-fits-all" way to coordinate human effort. While we may groan at the slow pace of a campus bureaucracy or feel the pressure of a fast-food assembly line, these structures are all attempts to solve the same fundamental puzzle: how to achieve together what we cannot accomplish alone. As you move into your career, you will likely encounter remnants of every perspective discussed here—from the top-down authority of "Theory X" to the inclusive, team-based values of "Theory Z." By recognizing these patterns, you become more than just a member of an organization; you become a savvy communicator capable of navigating, and ultimately improving, the organizational cultures of the future.

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- 11.3: A Chronological Look at Understanding Organizational Communication by Scott T. Paynton and Laura K. Hahn with Humboldt State University Students is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

9.3: Challenges in Organizational Communication

As you continue your education in college, you'll continue to understand the need to be prepared for a perpetually evolving, increasingly diverse, and unpredictable global workplace. The key to organizational success, both for you and the organizations with whom you are involved, is effective communication. As you have probably experienced in both your personal relationships and organizational relationships, communication is not always successful. If you have ever worked on a group project for one of your classes, you have likely experienced many of the communicative challenges organizations face in this increasingly fast-paced and global world.

Ineffective Communication

Ineffective communication can cause many problems that can impact relationships, productivity, job satisfaction, and morale as we interact in organizations. Gerald Goldhaber summarizes Osmo Wiio's "laws" of communication that are good to remember as you interact in increasingly complex organizations. Wiio pessimistically warns that: 1) If communication can fail, it will fail, 2) If a message can be understood in different ways, it will be misunderstood in the manner that does the most damage, 3) The more communication there is, the more tricky it is for the communication to be successful, and 4) There is always someone who thinks they know better what you said than you do.

Differences in perception and the failure to clarify communication can lead to miscommunication at interpersonal as well as organizational levels. Organizationally, communication failure occurs due to information overload, communication anxiety, unethical communication, bad timing, too little information, message distortion, lack of respect, insufficient information, minimal feedback, ineffective communication, and even disinterest or apathy. To be successful in our organizational environments, we need to be earnest participants, as well as active listeners, to ensure effective communication and mutual satisfaction. Organizations cannot successfully operate without effective communication at every level.

Unethical Communication

One of the greatest challenges facing organizations is the practice of ethics. Ethics are a basic code of conduct (morals) that individuals and groups use to assess whether something is right or wrong. How ethical are you as an organizational participant? Do you always make ethical personal and professional decisions? Have you ever withheld a bit of truth to lessen the impact of revealing the whole truth? What if you accidentally overhear that an individual who is up for a promotion has been stealing from the organization? Do you tell your boss? Or, on a greater scale, what if you discover that your organization is withholding vital information from consumers, or violating lawful practices? Do you blow the whistle or stay loyal to your company? When you write your resume, how accurately do you describe your work history? Each of these scenarios deals directly with ethical considerations and ethical communication.

Many organizations practice a climate of "survival of the fittest" as individuals scramble their way up the ladder of success at any cost. Comedian Jimmy Durante posited this advice: "Be nice to people on your way up because you might meet 'em on your way down." Obviously, not every organization has this type of cutthroat culture, but with an inherent hierarchy and imbalance of power, organizations are ripe for unethical behaviors. Because of the competitive nature of many business climates, and the push for profits, organizational and individual ethics are often tested.

Do organizations have a moral responsibility to act ethically outside of their capitalistic and legal obligations? "Since 1985, more than two-thirds of Fortune 500 firms have been convicted of serious crimes, ranging from fraud to the illegal dumping of hazardous waste" (Eisenberg & Goodall 337). The Chevron Corporation, the second largest oil company in the U.S., is just one example of an unethical organization. Tax evasion and several environmental infractions, including dumping over 18 billion gallons of toxic waste into the Amazon rainforest, are examples of their ethical behavior (Sandhu, 2012). Other unethical practices common in organizations include exploiting workers, tax loopholes, overbilling, and dumping toxins. Despite these unfortunate, immoral practices, all of us have an obligation to communicate ethically in all aspects of our lives, including organizations.

As with many other specializations in the field of Communication, the area of organizational communication is changing faster than organizations, individuals, and scholars can adapt. It is difficult for organizations to anticipate and keep in front of the changes they encounter. What worked during the industrial age may no longer be relevant in the 21st century. In fact, what worked ten years ago likely does not work today. A sense of urgency, a fast pace, inconsistency, information overload, regenerating

technology, and constant change characterize the dynamic changes as organizations move from operating in the industrial age to the information age. When this book was first published, for example, iPhones were just coming on the market. We referred to cds, dvds, and palm pilots in the original text. That was only eight eight years ago, and now we don't use many of those technologies. Miller identifies four elements of the changing landscape for organizations: 1) Organizations are becoming more global, 2) Images and identity are becoming increasingly important, 3) There is a shift to a more predominant service economy, and 4) The changing workforce is highlighted by the "disposable worker" (Conrad & Poole), downsizing, early retirement, and temporary workers.

As a result, new directions of research are emerging. These changes are forcing those of us in organizational communication to reexamine existing communicative practices relative to the changing dynamics of organizations. For example, can a person lead without any personal, face-to-face contact? How do organizational values impact ethics, and what is the attitude towards ethical communication in this increasingly competitive age? How should work-life issues such as working parents, affirmative action, and drug screening be handled? With increasing diversity in the workplace, what is the role of intercultural communication? In this age of elevated tensions, how do stress and emotions communicatively manifest themselves in the workplace? What is the impact of our social media postings on our work lives?

Scholars are continuing to communicatively adapt and respond to the changing landscape in terms of what we teach, research, and practice. Expect to see a variety of approaches and distinctively unique research agendas that will likely highlight the ways in which you will spend your life working in organizations that are different from today.

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9.4: Chapter 9 Summary

Organizational Communication Review

Why It Matters

You will spend the bulk of your waking life in organizations—schools, workplaces, nonprofits, and social groups. In fact, if you work for 40 years, you'll spend roughly 12 of those years at work! Organizations rely on communication to exist; as scholar Herbert Simon put it, "Without communication, there can be no organization."

Core Concepts

- Definition: A consciously coordinated social unit of two or more people working continuously toward common goals.
- Two Lenses of Communication:
  - Communication *in* Organizations: The conventional view where communication is a tool for transmitting messages to coordinate work.
  - Communication *as* Organization: The constitutive view where interaction literally *makes up* the organization's social world, roles, and rules.
- Why Employers Care: Surveys consistently rank oral/written communication and listening as the most sought-after skills. The U.S. Dept. of Labor calls communication competency the most vital skill for the 21st-century workforce.

Historical Perspectives (The Evolution of Work)

- Classical Management Perspective (The Machine Metaphor): Workers are seen as replaceable parts. Focus is on specialization, standardization, and predictability (e.g., Frederick Taylor's stopwatch studies and the McDonald's "Speedee Service System").
- Human Relations Perspective: Focuses on social needs. The Hawthorne Effect showed that productivity increases simply when workers feel they are being paid attention to.
- Human Resources Perspective: Views employees as valuable assets to be involved in decision-making (e.g., Ouchi's Theory Z, which values teamwork and collective responsibility).
- Systems Perspective: Views the organization as a living organism that must interact with its environment to survive. Key terms: *Equifinality* (multiple paths to one goal) and *Homeostasis* (stability).

Organizational Culture & Climate

- Culture: The shared values, beliefs, and "correct way to perceive" within an organization.
  - Artifacts: Visible symbols (office layout, dress code, logos).
  - Values: Strategies or yardsticks for judging behavior.
  - Basic Assumptions: Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs about human nature and truth.
- Climate: The subjective "mood" or atmosphere. Gibb identifies a continuum from supportive to defensive climates.

Types of Organizations

1. Mutual Benefit: Focus on members (unions, clubs, political parties).
2. Business Concerns: Focus on efficiency and profit (for-profit corporations).
3. Service: Focus on clients (hospitals, schools, social agencies).
4. Commonweal: Focus on the public at large (police, fire departments, military).

Modern Challenges & Ethics

- Communication: If you can be misunderstood, you will be.

- Ethics: A basic code of conduct. Challenges include tax evasion, environmental damage (e.g., Chevron), and the "survival of the fittest" mentality.

Mini-Quiz (check your understanding)

- What's the difference between "communication in" and "communication as" organization?
- Name two reasons employers rank communication as a top skill in their organization
- Name the four historical perspectives on organizational management.

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10: MASS COMMUNICATION

10.1: Defining Mass Communication
10.2: Functions of Mass Communication
10.3: Theories of Mass Communication
10.4: Mass Communication and Ethics
10.5: Media Literacy
10.6: Chapter 10 Summary

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10.1: Defining Mass Communication

As you head out the door after class, you hear music coming from the building sound system playing the student-run FM radio station. You walk to the student union to grab lunch and watch whatever they're playing on the large screen television. On your drive home, you turn on the radio to listen to the broadcast of your favorite baseball team. While driving, you notice the new billboard advertising Ford trucks. When you get home, you sit down in front of your computer. You check a class web page to see if you have homework, check the day's current events and sporting scores, then check your email. You read several messages, delete the spam, and get irritated at the pop-up advertisements that keep jumping on your screen. After shutting down your computer you sit on the couch to watch a movie streaming through Netflix. As you lean back on the couch, you clear away a stack of magazines to set down your drink.

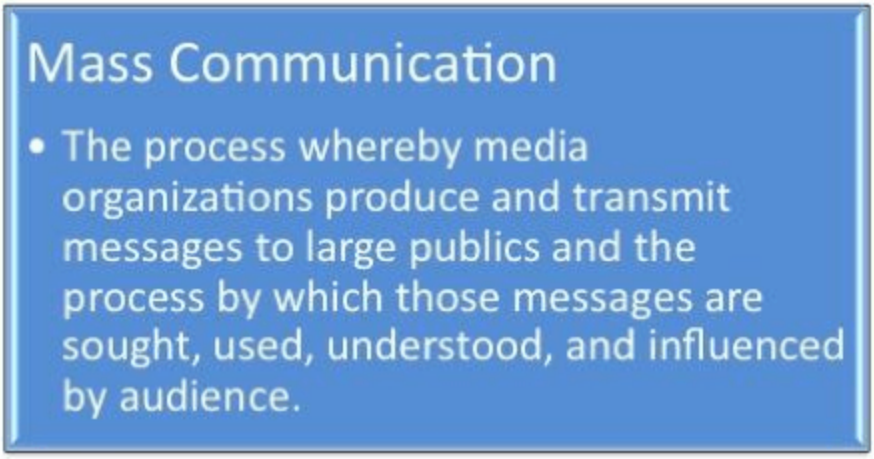


Figure 10.1.1: (CC BY; Ernst Moeksis via https://flic.kr/p/3KwKHD)

The above example is representative of the amount of mass communication we are exposed to daily. In the U.S. we witness and understand a great deal of our world through mass communication. Remember that in the early part of the 20th century, communication scholars began to ask questions about the impact of media as more and more mass communication outlets were developed. Questions then and now include: To what degree does mass communication affect us? How do we use or access mass communication? How does each medium influence how we interpret messages? Do we play an active or passive role when we interact with media? This chapter explores these questions by examining the concept of mass communication, its evolution, its functions, its theories, and its place in society.

Definition

Littlejohn and Foss (2011) define **mass communication** as *"the process whereby media organizations produce and transmit messages to large publics and the process by which those messages are sought, used, understood, and influenced by audience"* (333). Simply put, mass communication is the public transfer of messages through media or technology-driven channels to a large number of recipients from an entity, usually involving some type of cost or fee (advertising) for the user. "The sender often is a person in some large media organization, the messages are public, and the audience tends to be large and varied" (Berger, 2002, p. 121). However, with the advent of outlets like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and text messaging, these definitions do not account for the increased opportunities individuals now have to send messages to large audiences through mediated channels.



Nevertheless, most mass communication comes from large organizations that influence culture on a large scale. Schramm (1949) refers to this as a "working group organizer" (p. 115). Today the working groups that control most mass communication are large conglomerates such as Viacom, NewsCorp, Disney, ComCast, Time Warner, and CBS. In 2012, these conglomerates controlled 90% of American Media and mergers continue to consolidate ownership even more.

Remember our definition of communication study: "who says what, through what channels (media) of communication, to whom, [and] what will be the results" (Smith et al., 1946, p. 121)? When examining mass communication, we are interested in who has control over what content, for what audience, using what medium, and what are the results? Media critic Robert McChesney said we should be worried about the increasingly concentrated control of mass communication that results when just a handful of large organizations control most mass communication, "The implications for political democracy, by any standard, are troubling" (23). When interviewed, Ben Bagdikian, media critic and former Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California, Berkeley, cautiously pointed out that over the past two decades, major media outlets went from being owned by 50 corporations to just five (WGBH/Frontline). Both McChesney and Bagdikian warn about the implications of having so few organizations controlling the majority of our information and communication. Perhaps this is the reason new media outlets like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have consistently grown in popularity as they offer alternative voices to the large corporations that control most mass communication.

Mass Communication Now

This table shows the six most prosperous media conglomerates of 2014. Included is a list of just SOME of the networks they own.

COMCAST	News Corporation	Disney	VIACOM	TIMEWARNER	CBS
-NBC -MSNBC -AT&T	-FOX -Wall Street Journal -New York Post	-ABC -ESPN -Pixar -Miramax -Marvel Studios	-MTV -Nick JR. -CMT -Paramount pictures	-CNN -HBO -Time -Warner Bros.	-Showtime -Smithsonian Channel -NFL.com -Jeopardy -60 Minutes

Image produced with information from businessinsider.com

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.

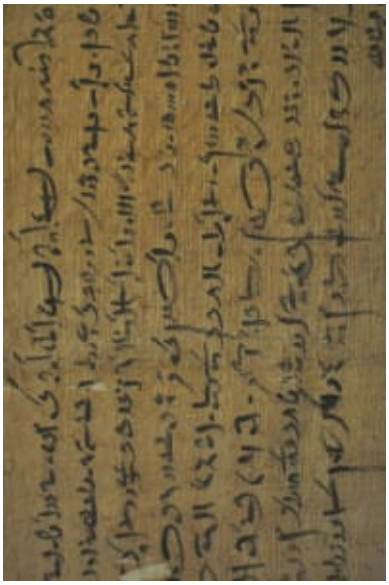
Mass communication continues to become more integrated into our lives at an increasingly rapid pace. This “metamorphosis” is representative by the convergence occurring (Fidler) between ourselves and technology, where we are not as distanced from mass communication as in the past. Increasingly, we have more opportunities to use mediated communication to fulfill interpersonal and social needs. O’Sullivan refers to this new use of mass communication to foster our personal lives as **“masspersonal communication”** 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, Twitter, Vine, Snapchat, and Instagram are great examples of new mass communication platforms we use to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships.

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. 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.

Evolution of Mass Communication

Societies have long had a desire to find effective ways to report environmental dangers and opportunities; circulate opinions, facts, and ideas; pass along knowledge, heritage, and lore; communicate expectations to new members; entertain in an expansive manner; and broaden commerce and trade (Schramm). The primary challenge has been to find ways to communicate messages to as many people as possible. Our need-to-know prompted innovative ways to get messages to the masses.

Before writing, humans relied on oral traditions to pass on information. “It was only in the 1920s-according to the Oxford English Dictionary-that people began to speak of ‘the media’ and a generation later, in the 1950s, of a ‘communication revolution’, but a concern with the means of communication is very much older than that” (Briggs & Burke 1). Oral and written communication played a major role in ancient cultures. These oral cultures used stories to document the past and impart cultural standards, traditions, and knowledge. With the development of alphabets around the world over 5000 years ago, written language with ideogrammatic (picture-based) alphabets like hieroglyphics started to change how cultures communicated.



Still, written communication remained ambiguous and did not reach the masses until the Greeks and Romans resolved this by establishing a syllable alphabet representing sounds. But, without something to write on, written language was inefficient. Eventually, paper making processes were perfected in China, which spread throughout Europe via trade routes (Baran). Mass communication was not quick, but it was far-reaching (Briggs & Burke). This forever altered how cultures saved and transmitted cultural knowledge and values. Any political or social movement throughout the ages can be traced to the development and impact of the printing press and movable metal type (Steinberg). With his technique, Guttenberg could print more than a single page of specific text. By making written communication more available to larger numbers of people, mass printing became responsible

for giving voice to the masses and making information available to common folks (McLuhan & Fiore). McLuhan argued that Gutenberg's evolution of the printing press as a form of mass communication had profound and lasting effects on culture, perhaps the most significant invention in human history.

With the transition to the industrial age in the 18th century, large populations headed to urban areas, creating mass audiences of all economic classes seeking information and entertainment. Printing technology was at the heart of modernization WHICH led to magazines, newspapers, the telegraph, and the telephone. At the turn of the century (1900), pioneers like Thomas Edison, Theodore Puskas, and Nikola Tesla literally electrified the world and mass communication. With the addition of motion pictures and radio in the early 1900s, and television in the 40s and 50s, the world increasingly embraced the foundations of today's mass communication. In the 1970s cable started challenging over-the-air broadcasting and traditional program distribution making the United States a wired nation. In 2014, there was an estimated 116.3 million homes in America that own a TV (Nielson, 2014 Advance National TV Household Universe Estimate). While traditionally these televisions would display only the programs that are chosen to be broadcast by cable providers, more and more households have chosen to become more conscious media consumers and actively choose what they watch through alternative viewing options like streaming video.

Today, smart T.V.'s and streaming devices have taken over the market and they are expected to be in 43% of households by 2016. These new forms of broadcasting have created a digital revolution. Thanks to Netflix and other streaming services we are no longer subjected to advertisements during our shows. Similarly, streaming services like Hulu provide the most recent episodes as they appear on cable that viewers can watch any time. These services provide instant access to entire seasons of shows (which can result in binge watching). The Information Age eventually began to replace the ideals of the industrial age. In 1983 *Time Magazine* named the PC the first "Machine of the Year." Just over a decade later, PCs outsold televisions. Then, in 2006, *Time Magazine* named "you" as the person of the year for your use of technology to broaden communication. Now the individual person has the potential to reach very large audiences. In this age of information overload, multiple news sources, high-speed connections, and social networking, life seems unimaginable without mass communication. With all of this talk and research about mass communication, what functions does it serve for us?

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10.2: 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 (1960) 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, televisions, and newspapers are the main sources for finding out what's going around you. Society relies on mass communication for news and information about our daily lives, it reports the weather, current issues, 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 smart phones instant access to information is at the users 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 if a fair representation of what really happens, the person would probably tell you "no."

- **Sensationalism**. There is an old saying in the news industry "if it bleeds, it leads," which highlights the idea of Sensationalism. Sensationalism 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" (35).

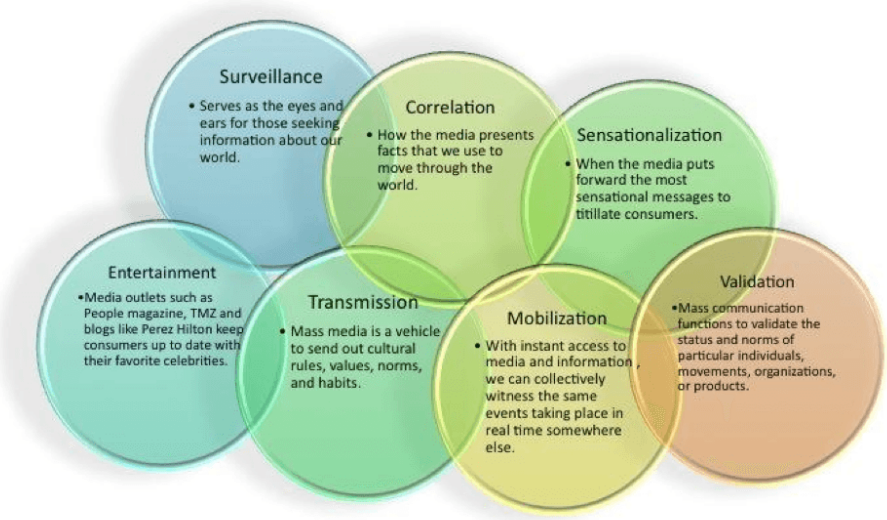
- **Entertainment**. Media outlets such as People Magazine, TMZ, and entertainment blogs such as Perez Hilton keep us up to date on the daily comings and goings of our favorite celebrities. We use technology to watch sports, go to the movies, play video games, watch YouTube videos, and listen to podcasts on a daily basis. Most mass communication simultaneously entertains and informs. People 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, acquaints 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, not recognizing 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 Caitlin Clark 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, 1994). 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's 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 & 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.



Functions of media

Given the power of the various functions of mass communication, we need to be reflective about its presence in our lives (McLuhan & Fiore). Continuing with the theme of this book, studying the role of mass communication heightens our awareness, helping us become media literate and strengthen our "ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages" (Baran, p. 374). Look around you. Mass communication's influence in contemporary society is pervasive, as we are all interlaced with it in our daily lives.

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10.3: 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, Salwen, & Dupagne). 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, p. 374). 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 five fundamental theories of mass communication: 1) the magic bullet theory, 2) two-step flow theory, 3) multi-step flow theory, 4) uses and gratification theory, and 5) cultivation theory.

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 8). 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.

Two-Step Flow Theory

After World War II, researchers began noticing that not all audiences react in the same ways to mass communication. Media had less power and relatively less effect than previously assumed (Klapper). The **two-step flow theory** suggests that mass communication messages do not move directly from a sender to the receiver (Katz & Lazarsfeld). Instead, *a small group of people, gatekeepers, screen media messages, reshape these messages, and control their transmission to the masses*. Opinion leaders initially consume "media content on topics of particular interest to them" and make sense of it based upon their own values and beliefs (Baran). In the second step, the opinion leaders filter and interpret the messages before they pass them along to opinion followers--individuals with shared ideologies who have less contact with the media. An example of this theory occurs during political campaigns. Research has shown that during an election, media influence your voting preferences (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet) through the information they choose to show about a candidate. This research can still be applied to current political campaigns. Conservatives often argue that they are marginalized by the "liberal media," while liberals argue that they are marginalized because wealthy conservatives own and control the media. Either way, research reveals that media dependency becomes increasingly important for the public especially during political campaigns (Jeffries).

Multi-step Flow Theory

Multi-step flow theory suggests that *there is a reciprocal nature of sharing information and influencing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors* (Troldahl; Troldahl & 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 even 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 127). 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 that 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. Yet, many of our students do not have television sets, but instead watch all television, movies, and videos online. Streaming shows online helps us avoid commercials and media content in which we choose not to participate. These new ways of watching television have allowed the consumer to make active choices about what media the 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 three and five 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 through YouTube videos, Instagram, Facebook, music videos or any other media distribution. 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.).

Cultivation theory asks the following questions: 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 & Ogles), body image, promiscuity, religion, families, attitudes toward racism (Allen & 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.

In summary, the transition from early concepts like the Magic Bullet theory to more contemporary frameworks like Cultivation and Uses and Gratification reflects a significant shift in how we perceive the audience—moving from passive recipients to active, sense-making participants. While theories like the Multi-Step Flow highlight the reciprocal and viral nature of modern digital communication, mass media still holds a profound power to blur, blend, and bend our collective perception of reality. Ultimately, these five theories provide the essential tools for navigating a landscape where the boundaries between fiction and truth are increasingly fluid, helping us understand not just how we use media, but how it continues to shape the cultural mainstream in which we live.

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10.4: Mass Communication and Ethics

Given the potential for mass communication messages to reach thousands to millions of people, the potential for positive or negative consequences of those messages exceed those of interpersonal, small group, or even public communication messages. Because of this, questions of ethics have to be closely considered when discussing mass communication and the media. In this section, we will discuss how media-ownership regulations, globalization, and representations of diversity tie in with mass communication ethics.

Media Control and Ownership

Media interests and ownership have become more concentrated over the past few decades as a result of deregulation. **Deregulation** refers to *the overturning or revising of policies that were in place to ensure that media outlets serve the interests of the public and include diverse viewpoints, programs, and ownership*. Deregulation occurred as a result of the rapid technological changes in the 1980s and 1990s, including the growth of cable and satellite outlets. The argument for deregulation was to make the overall market for network, cable, satellite, and other media outlets more competitive.



Restrictions on the number of radio and/or television stations a single person could own have lessened over the years, allowing individuals to control multiple media outlets. Gerogeri – radio tower – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Timeline of Changes Made by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (Austin, 2011)

- **1954–84.** The number of stations an individual or entity could own is limited to seven stations and each station is required to be in a separate geographic market.
- **1984.** The FCC expands ownership to twelve stations as long as the number of stations owned doesn't reach more than 25 percent of the national market
- **1996.** The Telecommunications Act eliminates a maximum on number of stations that one person or entity can own, as long as they do not reach more than 35 percent of the national market.
- **2003.** Cross-media ownership rules are relaxed, which allows for a person or entity to own both newspaper and broadcast outlets and radio and television outlets. The FCC increases the maximum audience one person or entity can reach to 45 percent of the national market, but Congress intervenes and reduces that to 39 percent.

The pressure to lessen regulations came as media outlets struggled to keep up with increased competition and technological changes and saw mergers and consolidations as a way to save money and keep a competitive edge. Television was one of the first forms of electronic mass media to begin to merge. Companies that you're familiar with now but probably didn't know were once separate entities include Time-Warner Cable (formed from the 1989 merger of Time, Inc. and Warner Communications, Inc.). General Electric, a company we may know for making refrigerators and stoves, bought the NBC television network in 1986. These

are just two of the many megamergers that have occurred in the past few decades.[1] The merger of these media companies was meant to provide a synergy that could lower costs and produce higher profits by, for example, merging Disney (with its expertise and market share of children's entertainment) and the broadcast network ABC (with its expertise in television and news).

As computers and the Internet began to enter households, media companies wanted to take advantage of the prospect of providing additional media services under one umbrella. **Media convergence** refers to *the merging of technologies that were previously developed and used separately* (Rayner, Wall, & Kruger, 2004). One such convergence that affects many if not most of you reading this book is the creation of broadband Internet access through existing cable lines and the bundling of cable and high-speed Internet services. This marked the beginning of a rush, on the part of media conglomerates, to own the methods of distribution for media messages as a means of then controlling the devices and technology that can be used on them. A recent and well-known example of this was iPhone's exclusive contract with AT&T. For the first few years that iPhones were on the market, AT&T was the only service provider that worked with the phones. To handle the data load needed to service all the new phones, AT&T had to rush and spend millions of dollars to upgrade its cellular network. These moves help preserve the media conglomerates' power, because smaller, independent, or competing companies cannot afford the time, resources, and money needed to build a competing or even functional distribution mechanism.

Consolidated media ownership has led to a decrease in localism in terms of local news and local reporters, radio DJs, and editors (Austin, 2011). Since business is handled from a central hub that might be hundreds or thousands of miles away from a market the media outlet serves, many of the media jobs that used to exist in a city or region have disappeared. While media consolidation has led to some structural and cultural changes in the United States, similar forces are at work in the process of globalization.

Media and Globalization

Globalization refers to *a complex of interconnecting structural and cultural forces that aid the spread of ideas and technologies and influence the social and economic organization of societies*. Just as modernization in the form of industrialization and then later a turn toward an information-based society spread across the globe, so do technologies and the forms of media they create. In all these cases, the spread of ideas, technologies, and media is imbalanced, as we will discuss more later. This type of cultural imperialism is often criticized as being a part of globalization, and scholars acknowledge that cultural imperialism is largely achieved through media messages (Siapera, 2012).

Media imperialism refers to *the domination of other countries through exported media and the values and ideologies they contain* (Rayner, Wall, & Kruger, 2004). Just as corporations have helped further globalization, media companies have expanded into multinational conglomerates in such a way that allows them to have power and influence that is difficult for individual nations to regulate or control. During the first seventy or so years of electronic mass media, countries could more easily control messages that were sent through cables or other hard structures. For example, telegraph, telephone, and television lines could be cut and even radio television stations that broadcast over the airwaves could be taken offline by cutting the power to the transmitter. As more information became digitized and sent via satellite, countries had much more difficulty limiting what could get in and out of their borders.

Media-fueled cultural imperialism is critiqued because of the concern that the imported cultural images and values will end up destroying or forever changing the cultural identity of the countries being "occupied" by foreign media. The flow of media is predictable and patterned. The cultural values of more-developed Western and Northern countries flow via media messages to the global East and South, mimicking the flow of power that has existed for centuries with the western and northern hemispheres, primarily Europe and the United States, politically and economically dominating countries in the southern and eastern hemispheres such as those in Asia, South America, and Africa. As with any form of imperialism, the poorest countries are the ones who are the most vulnerable and subjected to the most external control (Rayner, Wall, & Kruger, 2004). The reason more-developed countries dominate the media in other countries stems from available resources and knowledge needed to produce and transmit media content. Developing countries lack the same level of infrastructure (such as fiber-optic cables and satellite systems), technical expertise, and technology needed to produce their own content, which makes it cheaper to purchase Western, predominantly US American, content to fuel the growing desire of people in these countries to have access to media. This creates a negative cycle in which poorer countries use what resources they do have to carry Western content, which prevents them from investing in additional organic and local content and creates a demand for more Western content. Critics have also focused on the quality of the content that is exported, which is only representative of a narrow range of Western identities and values. Content tends to be dramatized programs like *Baywatch*, which at one point was the most-watched television program in the world. Dramas are preferred because humor is more likely to be lost in translation, while viewers can often identify with stock plot lines in dramas, which make the shows easier to translate and attracts a larger audience. The downside to this is that these narrowly chosen shows that run over and over in a specific country contribute to a stereotypical view of what life in the United States is like.

Not all the discussion of and scholarship on globalization and the media is negative. More recently, much research has focused on the notion of cultural hybridity and the ways in which some cultures take in foreign, predominantly Western media messages and representations and integrate them into existing cultural beliefs and practices. For example, one scholar writes about a quartet in Africa that takes European chamber music and incorporates African rhythms and another group that takes American hip-hop music and gives it a more traditional African flair (Rayner, Wall, & Kruger, 2004). Additionally, the emergence of social and personal media allows users in specific countries to generate their own content and adopt and utilize media platforms in their own ways. As we will learn later, social and personal media have been used to overthrow oppressive governments and to increase the flow of information in places where it was once restricted. So, in these cases, we can see that the ability of certain forms of communication to cross borders has led to positive change.

We can even examine the spread of personal media and social media as an example of globalization. Here, rather than a specific message or set of cultural values being distributed around the world, a platform was made available and adopted in a more democratic, less imperialistic way. Social media, unlike more traditional modes of media, bring people together in more self-determined ways. For example, people can connect over the Internet to a blogger with a shared interest and interact with one another via comments or other means.

Media and Representation

Another area of concern for those who study mass media is the representation of diversity (or lack thereof) in media messages. The FCC has identified program, ownership, and viewpoint diversity as important elements of a balanced mass media that serves the public good (Austin, 2011). This view was enforced through the Fairness Doctrine that was established in 1949 and lasted until the early 1980s when it began to be questioned by those in favor of media deregulation. The Fairness Doctrine was eventually overturned in 1987, but the FCC tried in 2003 to reinstate policies that encourage minority ownership of media outlets, which they hoped in turn would lead to more diverse programming. It remains to be seen whether or not minority-owned media outlets will produce or carry more diverse programming, but it is important to note that the deregulation over the past few decades has led to a decrease in the number of owners of media outlets who come from minority groups.

Scholars have raised concerns about the number of characters from minority groups on television relative to the groups' percentage of the population. Perhaps even more concerning is the type of characters that actors from minority groups play and the types of shows on which they appear. Whether we want them to be or not, the people we see featured in media messages, especially those who appear frequently on television, in movies, in magazines, or in some combination of the three, serve as role models for many that view them. These people help set the tone for standards of behavior, beauty, and intelligence, among other things. **Social learning theory** claims that *media portrayals influence our development of schemata or scripts, especially as children, about different groups of people* (Signorielli, 2009). For example, a person who grows up in a relatively homogenous white, middle-class environment can develop schemata about African Americans and Latina/os based on how they are depicted in media messages. Cultivation theory, which we discussed earlier, also supports the notion that media representations affect our perceptions and actions. Since media messages, overall, are patterned representations, they cultivate within users a common worldview from the seeds that are planted by a relatively narrow set of content. For example, people in television shows are disproportionately portrayed as middle-class professionals. In reality, about 67 percent of people working in the United States have blue-collar or service-industry jobs, but they only make up about 10 percent of the people on television (Griffin, 2009).



Figure: Even though the majority of workers in the United States classify as blue-collar or service workers, they only make up about 10 percent of the people on television. Brian Statler – Blue Collar Project – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

African Americans, Latina/os, and women are underrepresented in television, and people over the age of sixty-five are the most-excluded group (Griffin, 2009). Studies show that there is less diversity in mediated messages relative to the population as a whole and that the images and messages in the media contain certain themes that rely on stereotypes and further reduce the complexity of our society. Over time, these recurring images and messages affect what we think and how we view the world. In particular, research based on social learning and cultivation theories find that people who watch more television have views that reflect what they see in the programming they watch.

Looking specifically at television, representations of African Americans on prime-time shows (those that air between 7 and 11 p.m.) are actually proportional to their percentage of the population. Whites, however, are overrepresented, meaning there is a larger percentage of white people on prime-time shows than there is in our actual population. This disparity can be accounted for by pointing out that Latina/o, Native, and Asian Americans, as well as African American females, are underrepresented if not invisible in much of the media (Signorielli, 2009). For example, a study of minority characters on prime-time television between 2001 and 2008 found that Latina/os make up 5 percent of the characters despite being 16 percent of the population.

As the number of minority-focused programs, especially sitcoms, has decreased in the past ten years, minority characters have diffused more into other shows. While this integration is positive in some ways, there are still many examples of shows on which a minority character is the lone person of color or gay or lesbian person. From the view of social learning and cultivation theory, this is problematic, since many people, especially children, may form their early perceptions of difference based on interactions with characters in media messages. So unless viewers intentionally seek out diverse programming, they will likely mostly see people with dominant identities represented in the media they consume (Signorielli, 2009).

There has been a similar lack of diversity found among new media. In a first-of-its-kind study of gender representation in online news sources, the Global Media Monitoring Project found after analyzing news stories on seventy-six websites in sixteen countries that only 36 percent of the stories were reported by women, and women were the focus of only 23 percent of all the stories written (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2012). Another look at popular, blog-style news sites such as *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, *Slate*, and *Salon* found that representations of minorities conformed to stereotypes. For example, African Americans were featured primarily in stories about athletics, Latino/as appeared in stories about immigration, and Native and Asian Americans were absent (Jackson, 2012). Even when a major source for online information like *The Huffington Post* tries to include more diverse viewpoints, it does so under criticism. The website decided to add a section focused on information and news of interest to African Americans after adding twenty-six other sections ranging from information on travel to divorce. Although the editor of the section wanted to have a nuanced discussion about race, many of her ideas were discounted because they were not “buzzy enough,” meaning they might not attract enough readers. So instead of starting a dialogue about race, most of the stories featured on the first day were more “buzz worthy” and, ironically, written by white reporters (Jackson, 2012).

Some people who study and/or work in the media view media diversity as a means of expanding public dialogue, creating a more-informed citizenry, and enhancing our democracy through positive social change. Some online news sources have taken up such a call, but they fall short of the popularity or profitability of more mainstream news outlets. The online investigative news outlet

ProPublica has received positive attention and awards for their coverage of a wide range of issues, including stories that focus on underrepresented communities.[2] The advent of new and personal media makes it easier for individuals and independent rather than corporate-owned media outlets to take advantage of new technologies and platforms to produce quality media products on a budget. As consumers of media, we can also keep a critical eye open for issues of representation and seek out media that is more inclusive and diverse.

Mass communication is tied to the ethical challenges of consolidated media ownership, media imperialism, deregulation, and the resulting lack of diverse representation. As globalization continues to facilitate a form of cultural imperialism, the necessity for critical media literacy becomes paramount. By recognizing these systemic biases and the power of mediated messages, we can move from being passive receptors to informed participants capable of navigating and challenging the increasingly converged media landscape.

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10.5: Media Literacy

Media literacy involves our ability to critique and analyze the potential impact of the media. The word *literacy* refers to our ability to read and comprehend written language, but just as we need literacy to be able to read, write, and function in our society, we also need to be able to read media messages. To be media literate, we must develop a particular skill set that is unfortunately not taught in a systematic way like reading and writing. The quest to make a more media-literate society is not new. You may be surprised to learn that the media-literacy movement began in the 1930s when a chapter of the American Association of University Women in Madison, Wisconsin, created a newspaper column and a radio program called "Broadcast on Broadcasts" that reviewed and evaluated current media messages and practices (Dunlop, & Kymnes, 2007). Despite the fact that this movement has been around for eighty years now, many people still don't know about it.

Media literacy isn't meant to censor or blame the media, nor does it advocate for us to limit or change our engagement with the media in any particular way. Instead, media literacy ties in with critical thinking and listening, which we have learned about throughout this book already. Media-literacy skills are important because media outlets are "culture makers," meaning they reflect much of current society but also reshape and influence sociocultural reality and real-life practices. Some may mistakenly believe that frequent exposure to media or that growing up in a media-saturated environment leads to media literacy. Knowing how to use technology to find and use media is different from knowing how to analyze it. Like other critical thinking skills, media literacy doesn't just develop; it must be taught, learned, practiced, and reflected on.

Media-literacy skills teach us to analyze the media and to realize the following:[3]

- All media messages are constructed (even "objective" news stories are filmed, edited, and introduced in ways that frame and influence their meaning).
- Media structures and policies affect message construction (which means we need to also learn about how media ownership and distribution function in our society—a growing concern that we discussed earlier in this section).
- Each medium has different characteristics and affects messages differently (e.g., a story presented on *The Colbert Report* will likely be less complete and more dramatized than a story presented on a blog focused on that topic).
- Media messages are constructed for particular purposes (many messages are constructed to gain profit or power, some messages promote change, and some try to maintain the status quo).
- All media messages are embedded with values and beliefs (the myth of objectivity helps mask the underlying bias or misrepresentation in some messages).
- Media messages influence our beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors, including how we perceive and interact with others and how we participate in larger society.
- Media messages can prevent change (intentionally presenting manipulated or selectively chosen content to inhibit change).

Through media, we learn much about the world that we do not have direct experience with, and communication and media scholars theorize that we tend to believe media portrayals are accurate representations of life. However, research shows that the media represents race, gender, sexuality, ability, and other cultural identities in biased and stereotypical ways that often favor dominant identities (Allen, 2011). Since the media influences our beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about difference, it is important to be able to critically evaluate the mediated messages that we receive. The goal of media literacy is not to teach you what to think but to teach you how you can engage with, interpret, and evaluate media in a more informed manner. To be media literate is to be reflective in that we are must be accountable for those choices we make by reflecting on and being prepared to articulate how those choices fit in with our own belief and value systems.

There are some standard questions that you can ask yourself to help you get started in your media criticism and analysis. There are no "true" or "right/wrong" answers to many of the questions we ask during the critical thinking process. Engaging in media literacy is more about expanding our understanding and perspective rather than arriving at definitive answers. The following questions will help you hone your media-literacy skills (Allen, 2011):

1. Who created this message? What did they hope to accomplish? What are their primary belief systems?
2. What is my interpretation of this message? How and why might different people understand this message differently than me? What can I learn about myself based on my interpretation and how it may differ from others'?
3. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented or omitted in this message? What does this tell me about how other people live and believe? Does this message leave anything or anyone out?
4. Why was this message sent? Who sent it? Is it trying to tell me something? To sell me something?

After asking these questions, media-literate people should be able to use well-reasoned arguments and evidence (not just opinion) to support their evaluations. People with media-literacy skills also know that their evaluations may not be definitive. Although this may seem like a place of uncertainty, media-literate people actually have more control over how they interact with media messages, which allows them to use media to their advantage, whether that is to become better informed or to just enjoy their media experience.

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10.6: Chapter 10 Summary

Mass Communication Review

What this chapter helps us understand

- How mass communication functions as a "culture maker" that shapes our social reality.
- The shift in media theory from seeing audiences as passive "targets" to active "participants."
- The ethical implications of media consolidation and the lack of diverse representation.
- How to apply media literacy to analyze the messages we consume daily.

Core Concepts (The Building Blocks)

- Mass Communication: The process where media organizations produce and transmit messages to large publics, and how those messages are received and influenced by the audience.
- Media Convergence: The merging of previously separate technologies (e.g., your smartphone acting as a phone, camera, TV, and newspaper).
- Media Literacy: The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate mediated messages. It is a skill that must be practiced, not just a result of exposure.

The 7 Functions of Mass Communication

Function	Purpose
Surveillance	Serving as the "eyes and ears" of society (news, weather, crisis alerts).
Correlation	How media presents facts we use to move through the world (often biased).
Sensationalization	Using titillating content to attract consumers ("If it bleeds, it leads").
Entertainment	Providing an escape, companionship, or catharsis.
Transmission	Socializing us into cultural norms, values, and rules.
Mobilization	Organizing people around a particular event or crisis (e.g., Reddit during the Boston Bombing).
Validation	Enforcing social norms by showing what is "normal" vs. "abnormal."

Five Fundamental Theories

1. Magic Bullet (Hypodermic Needle): Suggests media "injects" messages into a passive audience. Status: Discredited for ignoring individual differences.
2. Two-Step Flow: Media messages move from senders to gatekeepers (opinion leaders), who then filter them for opinion followers.
3. Multi-Step Flow: A reciprocal relationship where opinion leaders and followers influence each other (e.g., viral social media trends).
4. Uses & Gratifications: Audiences are active, sense-making participants who choose media to satisfy specific needs.
5. Cultivation Theory: Media "cultivates" a worldview over time. Includes the Three B's: Media Blurs traditional distinctions of reality, Blends realities into a cultural mainstream, and Bends that mainstream to fit institutional interests.

Ethics, Power, and Globalization

- Media Consolidation: In 2012, just six conglomerates controlled 90% of American media. This concentration limits the diversity of viewpoints.

- Deregulation: The overturning of policies (like the Fairness Doctrine) intended to ensure media serves the public interest.
- Media Imperialism: The domination of other countries through exported Western media and values, often at the expense of local cultural identities.
- Representation: The FCC identifies three types of necessary diversity: Program, Ownership, and Viewpoint. Currently, many groups (Latina/os, elderly, etc.) remain underrepresented or stereotyped.

Check Your Understanding

1. Why is the Magic Bullet Theory no longer accepted by scholars?
2. What is the difference between Media Imperialism and Cultural Hybridity?
3. How does Cultivation Theory explain "Mean World Syndrome"?
4. What are two questions a media-literate person should ask when viewing a news story?

Fast Examples to Remember

- Gatekeeping: An editor deciding which stories make the front page.
- Convergence: Watching a Netflix movie on your laptop while tweeting about it.
- Sensationalism: A news outlet focusing on a celebrity scandal instead of a policy change to get more "clicks."

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11: MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

11.1: CMC, New Media, and Masspersonal Communication
11.2: New Media and Society
11.3: Masspersonal Communication in Practice
11.4: Mediated Communication Competence
11.5: Chapter 11 Summary

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11.1: CMC, New Media, and Masspersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define masspersonal communication and distinguish it from traditional mass media and early computer-mediated communication (CMC) by identifying the blurring lines between private and public interactions.
- Explain the "democratizing potential" of new media—such as citizen journalism and gatewatching—while identifying ethical challenges including content filtering, surveillance, and the digital divide.
- Describe how digital platforms impact interpersonal concepts, specifically the blurring of parasocial relationships, the intensification of "facework" in impression management, and the phenomenon of context collapse.
- Identify how new media affordances have reshaped traditional non-verbal codes, specifically chronemics (the shift from synchronicity to efficiency), proxemics (the concept of being "alone together"), and haptics (the physical demands of touch-screen technology).
- Recognize the risks associated with the permanence of digital communication, including the role of data mining and psychographic profiling in the modern "augmented reality."

The transition of the internet from a niche workplace tool in the mid-nineties to the primary engine of global social life happened with breathtaking speed. In just two decades, we moved from the novelty of personal email accounts to a world where user-generated celebrities broadcast to millions from their bedrooms. This rapid evolution forced communication scholars to look beyond traditional face-to-face interactions and investigate the emerging field of computer-mediated communication (CMC). As digital platforms began to facilitate everything from illegal file-sharing to the birth of social media giants like Facebook, a fundamental question arose: could a digital screen ever truly replicate the "richness" and sensory depth of a human encounter?

Early Research

The adoption of internet-based technologies was quick, but it still happened in stages. In the mid-nineties, most people in the United States were not using the internet at home, and it was not until the late nineties that personal email accounts became common (Manovitch, 2001). A few years later, the internet became a sharing platform where media content was being uploaded and downloaded, often illegally (Jones & Lenhart, 2004). In 2007, the first iPhone was released for sale only a few months after a website called Facebook opened its membership to everyone, setting off a whole new trend in how people use the internet (Jones et al., 2009). By the early 2010s, the use of video streaming technologies featuring original user-generated content had gained popularity. It birthed a new generation of self-made celebrities who attracted fans and enabled fandom to be expressed in newer and more elaborate ways in online forums and fan-generated sites (Marwick, 2015).

Each of these new stages in the function and functionality of the internet created questions for communication scholars interested in studying the ways that our social interactions online compared to the social interactions we have offline. Those scholars who had mainly focused on interpersonal communication in the last decades of the twentieth century engaged in the study of what was then known as **computer-mediated communication** (CMC). It refers to the *interactions that take place between people who are using computers to communicate*. CMC regularly occurs today. However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, it was only just emerging as a natural form of interaction between people outside of the workplace. What interested these scholars about CMC was whether it afforded the same kind of interpersonal experience that people have when they communicate face-to-face (Daft & Lengel, 1984; 1986; Walther, 1996; 2012).

Their research developed many theories, but one key concept underlined most of them, which was media richness. **Media richness** refers to *how closely a specific media channel can replicate the interaction of an in-person face to face encounter*. Rich media afford us as much sensory data as possible (Manovitch, 2001). On Skype, for example, I can not only hear someone but also see them. Skype is much richer than a medium like text messaging, where I can neither see nor hear the recipient, but only text-based messages that they send.

Overall, the theories surrounding CMC and interpersonal communication found that media richness was itself hard to define because the technologies being studied changed so much during that period. But some common threads emerged from the research: In some ways, digital technologies limit our abilities to establish intimacy, interpret non-verbal cues, and establish

competency. In other ways, digital technologies had created new modalities for interpersonal exchange that required new research (Short, et al., 1976; Daft & Lengel, 1984; 1986; Fulk, et al., 1987; Carlson & Zmud, 1994; Walther, 1996; 2012).

New Media

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, these theories were put forth prior to the emergence of what is today known as new media. **New media** is the *evolution of media from the form we used to know as mass media to a more dynamic model*.

Before the internet connected our digital devices through a giant network that spans the globe, media production was limited to only those who had access to the physical equipment needed to make and distribute messages to an audience of more than just a few people. This distribution model was the era of mass media, a time when a small group of media producers delivered content to a broad mass audience of people through the television networks, radio stations, and publishing companies that controlled what content was made public.

Thanks to the internet, we are now living in the era of new media, a time when a person can communicate to either a small group or a large audience of people just by posting something online (Marwick, 2015; Campbell, et al., 2018). The mass media of television, radio, print, and film still exist today, but they now have to compete with the new media that are produced and consumed online (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018). YouTubers, who now sometimes command audiences of tens of millions while broadcasting from their bedrooms (Marwick, 2015), are a perfect example of the difference between new media and mass media**.**

Masspersonal Communication

As O' Sullivan and Carr (2018) note, this new media dynamic is of particular interest to the study of interpersonal communication because it allows users to realize their communication potential in new ways. Primarily, it blends the practices of interpersonal communication with practices that were formerly thought of as being presentational. The dynamic affordances of new media defy the distinctions that used to be made between mediated and interpersonal communication.

Because of this shift, O'Sullivan and Carr (2018) call the communication that takes place through new media outlets, **masspersonal communication** to reflect *the meshing practices of traditional mass media with the practices of interpersonal communication*. In the next module, we'll explore some of the ways that masspersonal communication manifests itself into common communication practices today.

Ultimately, early research into CMC revealed a complex tension: while digital channels often limited our ability to interpret non-verbal cues and establish intimacy, they simultaneously created entirely new modalities for human exchange. As the rigid, gatekept structures of traditional mass media gave way to the dynamic, interactive landscape of new media, the very definitions of communication began to shift. We have moved past the simple distinction between talking to a friend and broadcasting to a crowd. Instead, we have entered the age of masspersonal communication, a hybrid reality where interpersonal intimacy and public presentation are inextricably meshed, forever changing how we realize our communication potential

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11.2: New Media and Society

Media studies pioneer Marshall McLuhan emphasizes that long before what we now call “new media” existed, that studying media and technology can help us understand our society. In short, he didn’t believe that we could study media without studying society, as the two are bound together (Siapera, 2012). The ongoing switch from analogue to digital, impersonal to personal/social, and one-way to dialogic media is affecting our society in interesting ways.

The days of analogue media are coming to an end and, indeed, are over in many places. These technological changes haven’t solved some problems that are being carried over from old media. Some of the same problems with representation and access for which the mass media were criticized are still present in new media, despite its democratizing potential. As we discussed earlier, new media increase participation and interactivity, giving audience members and users more control over content and influence over media decisions. But media critics point out that participants are not equally distributed (Jenkins, 2006). Research shows that new media users, especially heavy users who are more actively engaged, tend to be male, middle class, and white.

New Media and Democracy

Scholars and reporters have noted the democratizing effect of new media, meaning that new media help distribute power to the people through their personal and social characteristics. Many media scholars have commented on these changes as a positive and more active and participative alternative to passive media consumption (Siapera, 2012). Instead of the powerful media outlets exclusively having control over what is communicated to audiences and serving as the sole gatekeeper, media-audience interactions are now more like a dialogue. The personal access to media and growing control over media discourses by users allows people to more freely express opinions, offer criticisms, and question others—communicative acts that are all important for a functioning democracy.

Political Engagement

A recent national survey found that young people, aged fifteen to twenty-five, are using new media to engage with peers on political issues.[1] The survey found that young people are defying traditional notions of youthful political apathy by using new media platforms to do things like start online political groups, share political videos using social media, or circulate news stories about political issues.



New media are being used by people, especially young people, to engage with political causes and participate in the democratic process by sharing news stories and “liking” and commenting on other people’s postings. Sean MacEntee – facebook like button – CC BY 2.0.

These activities were not included in previous research done on the political habits of young people because those surveys typically focused on more traditional forms of political engagement like voting, joining a political party, or offline campaigning. Political engagement using new media is viewed as more participatory, since people can interact with their peers without having to go through official channels or institutions. But the research also found that this type of participatory political engagement also led to traditional engagement, as those people were twice as likely to vote in the actual election.[2]

Although the digital divide is a continuing ethical issue, new media have had a more positive effect on places that are often left out of such technologies. For example, although many people in developing countries still do not have access to dependable electricity or water, they may have access to a cell phone or the Internet through NGO programs or Internet cafés. Many people, especially US Americans, may think the days of Internet cafés (also called cyber cafés) are over. Although Internet cafés were never as popular or numerous in the United States, communal and public Internet access is still an important part of providing access to the Internet all around the world (Liff & Lægran, 2003).

Ownership and Control

Issues of ownership and control are as present in new media as they are in traditional mass media. In mass media, a series of gatekeepers vet messages and control the information that reach millions; producers strictly control and censor content in order to ensure the broadest possible appeal. In new media, we may feel we make choices about what to consume, but algorithms tailored to our searches and buying patterns determine the content we see.

Additionally, people may think they are multitasking and accessing different media outlets, they may not be. To help keep users within their domain, some large new media platforms like Facebook and Yahoo! create expansive environments that include news, social media connections, advertising, and entertainment, which allow users to click around and feel like they are moving freely even though they are not leaving the general owner's space.

That said, new media does provide ways of countering some of the control and participation issues that audiences have typically faced as the lines blur between producers and consumers of media. The phrase **alternative media** is often associated with new media. Alternative media include *a range of voices with diverse cultural identities and experiences, which counter the mainstream media outlets that are controlled by and include the voices and perspectives of more privileged people*. Alternative media is very similar to and, in fact, overlaps with **tactical media**, which are more *activist-oriented and include dissenting and "radical" perspectives that challenge the status quo*. From a truly democratic perspective, which is supposed to invite and encourage dissent, a plurality of voices, and civil debate, alternative and tactical media are welcome additions to the traditional media landscape that tries to diminish, rather than encourage, competing voices.

Blogs were the earliest manifestation of Web 2.0 and marked the beginning of the turn to more user-generated content and the democratization of information gathering and sharing. While "web logging" existed in various forms before 1999, that year marked blogging's "big bang" as the software application Blogger made it easy for people who did not know HTML (the computer code used to build websites) to compose and publish their blog as well as link to other blogs and relevant content (Boler, 2008). Just as then, today's blogs provide information that varies in terms of depth, quality, and credibility. Blogs that are most relevant to our discussion of democracy are those whose authors engage in citizen journalism and/or gatewatching.

Blogs are an accessible and popular outlet for citizen journalism, which is reporting done by individuals or small groups outside of the media establishment as a corrective to mainstream journalism, which may inaccurately report or underreport a story (Boler, 2008). Citizen journalists increasingly play a part in shaping local and national discussions of news and have received positive and negative evaluations from mainstream media and audiences. For example, Dr. Heather Cox Richardson, a historian at Boston College, started writing a nightly substack discussing current political news in the context of American history. By the summer of 2026, she has nearly three million subscribers.

One corrective function of alternative media and citizen journalists is the gatewatching function. Recall that earlier we discussed the gatekeeping function of mass media through which reporters, editors, executives, and advertisers influence what content and how much of it makes it to audiences. Citizen journalists revised this notion to be more actively involved in the process, so **gatewatching** refers to *a media criticism practice that seeks to correct or expand mainstream media reporting*. These citizen journalists look for stories or information that will be relevant to their often smaller more niche audiences.

Since many people use new media to access information, they seek out information specifically targeted toward their interests and needs. New media make this type of "micro media" a viable alternative to mass media. The citizen journalists then transmit that information to their audience through a blog or microblog, such as X. In this sense, they act as gatewatchers for the mass media and serve the traditional gatekeeper function for their niche audiences. They may comment on how one media outlet covered a story while another did not or how one outlet used more credible sources than the other. They may also critique a media outlet for shallow coverage or overcoverage. Interestingly, the information generated by these citizen journalists increasingly influences the mainstream media's coverage. Stories that may not have been picked up by a major media outlet now get covered after they receive much attention through new and social media. People in such cases may demand that major media outlets cover the story, or the outlet may choose to cover it on their own to capitalize on the popularity of the story.

New Media and Ethics

If you buy a song from iTunes, should you be able to play it on any device you wish? Should ideas or knowledge that can lead to positive change for many people (like an approach to international conflict mediation or a scientific discovery that could lead to a new lifesaving medication) be protected and kept from the public through intellectual property laws? How much information and creative works should be available in the public domain to help further knowledge and inspire further innovation and creativity, and how much of that should be protected? These questions aren't easy to answer, and many answers spark controversy as they bring up issues of censorship and information control.



In recent years lawmakers, law enforcers, and media companies have taken more steps to deter and/or prosecute people who violate copyright laws. Cory Doctorow – Office Depot copyright warning – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Censorship, which is *the suppression, limiting, or deleting of speech*, is an issue that predates the advent of mass media and new media but one that has become more prevalent as the amount, access to, and diversity of information has increased. Censorship is based on the notion of freedom of speech, which is a foundational principle of the US Constitution and was declared a universal human right by the United Nations (Deibert, 2008). It is important to discuss censorship in the section on new media because the Internet, which is the basis for most new media, has been envisioned as an avenue toward and an outlet for more free speech. Censorship is enacted and free speech limited in two primary ways on the Internet: through intellectual property rights and copyrights and through content filtering by governments or other entities (Deibert, 2008).

Intellectual Property Rights and Copyrights

One of the technological changes that made the birth and explosion of new media possible is the near-universal compatibility of digital content. This along with the absence of a physical object onto which media content is coded (a DVD instead of a digital file on a computer or other device) has created issues with increased piracy, which refers to the unlawful reproduction and/or distribution of intellectual property or other copyrighted material (Deibert, 2008). This problem gained much attention following the mass popularity of the peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing program Napster. Despite the numerous lawsuits and legal challenges that Napster faced, P2P file-sharing programs like Limewire, Vuze, and bitTorrent became the new way to legally and illegally share files ranging from software to video games, documents, books, music, and movies.

Once anything is digitized and makes its way to one of these networks, it becomes nearly impossible to control or limit its circulation. For example, media corporations and law enforcement and government agencies may try to prosecute individuals, require Internet service providers to take action against users who illegally download materials or visit suspect sites, or shut down domain names based in the United States (Newman, 2012). None of these measures has been very effective, especially for sites based outside of the United States, but a renewed effort on the part of interest groups that represent the entertainment industry led to the introduction of two pieces of legislation that stirred up quite a backlash. The Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA) were introduced into the House of Representatives and the Senate in order to make it more difficult for sites, in the United States and abroad, to distribute pirated copyrighted materials ranging from movies, to music, to digital books. Although many people applaud the effort to stop the circulation of pirated material, many were also afraid that the regulations

could lead to restrictions on other forms of information circulation such as open source sharing and crowdsourcing (Magid, 2012). To protest and raise awareness of these laws, several high-profile sites and hundreds of other online supporters engaged in the largest act of cyberprotest to date. On January 18, 2012, sites like Wikipedia, Google, and Craigslist "went black," limited content, or displayed information about SOPA and PIPA. Within a few days, support for the laws had dwindled, and both are now on indefinite hold.

Most new media scholars and commentators do not question the fact that some information should be protected as intellectual property and that many artistic creations should be copyrighted. Such practices help ensure that innovation and creativity are recognized and that the people who create them are duly compensated. Such protections actually help promote and protect freedom of speech and provide an incentive for people to expend considerable time and effort to produce innovative and creative products and exchange ideas and art that circulate and enhance our society (Deibert, 2008). Intellectual property rights and protections are newer and more difficult to enforce and even define than are copyrights. After all, putting protections on "knowledge" or "information" is more ambiguous than putting a copyright on a discrete item like a book or song. In the realm of academia, especially, the philosophy of open and shared knowledge has been applied to academic research and scholarship. Ideas and findings are free to circulate and be used and adapted (with the proper citation and/or credit given) in order to further knowledge and provide a system of transparency and accountability. Corporations and companies have long had a more closed policy to knowledge and information, keeping many product ideas and designs to themselves and considering them proprietary information. Such practices, including issuing patents for inventions or considering certain information confidential, help keep individuals and businesses striving for better and/or more competitive products or ideas. The increase in corporate-like application of such protections to intellectual property in academia and other scientific areas that were historically more open and collaborative has received much criticism. To reiterate, these issues exist independently of new media, but the fact that most ideas and creations are now in digital form and that the Internet provides for sharing and then rapid and uncontrollable diffusion of such material is what creates the issue relevant to our discussion. And the issue of enforcement is what brings us back to the notion and ethics of censorship.

Content Filtering

Research shows that Internet **content filtering** is increasing as new technologies allow governments and other entities to effectively target and block Internet users from accessing undesirable information. For example, in 2002 only two countries, China and Saudi Arabia, were known to actively filter Internet content within their borders. Presently, many more countries, including the United States, engage in such content filtering. Content filtering can happen at different levels.[3] Filtering or blocking can happen at the Internet backbone level, which is the method most often used to limit information at the national level. In such cases, content is filtered out at an infrastructure or gateway point before it ever enters the country. Internet service providers can also block or censor content at the request of governments or other groups. Institutions can block certain content using software or other technical means. This type of blocking may be carried out to meet the objectives or values of a particular institution—for example, to block sexually explicit information from school computers. Finally, censorship can occur at the individual computer level. In such cases, parents or others may want to control the information available with filtering software that is customizable.

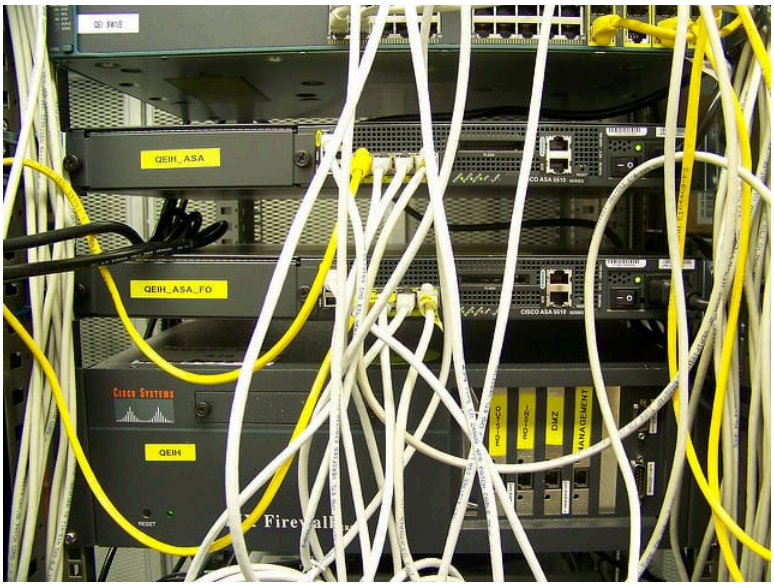


Figure: While it is difficult to control what individuals put on the Internet, governments and other groups have been very effective at blo certain content at the “backbone” level of the Internet. Stefano Petroni – Firewall – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Typically, blocked content includes pornography or other materials deemed sexually explicit, information deemed harmful to national security or public safety (e.g., bomb-making information), and information that challenges a government or regime’s power (Deibert, 2008). In 2009, Bahrain was reported to make the most substantial increase in filtering of any country, as it limited many social, religious, political, and human rights sites (Faris & Zittrain, 2009). In terms of politics and human rights blocking, China blocked access to Twitter in the lead-up to the twenty-year anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests. Saudi Arabia has taken a more targeted approach by blocking the accounts of two prominent human rights activists (Faris & Zittrain, 2009). Religiously offensive material can also be blocked as evidenced by Pakistan’s practice of blocking information that is offensive to Islam.

The issue of censoring information deemed to be religiously offensive gained worldwide attention in September of 2012 when a video trailer for an anti-Islamic movie made in the United States made its way onto YouTube, which sparked protests in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, Tunisia, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, and many other countries. In response to calls from some of these countries for the United States to remove the video from YouTube, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton condemned the video but affirmed that the video is protected under the right to free speech promised by the US Constitution. Google, which owns YouTube, also stated that the video doesn’t violate US law or Google’s terms of service and would therefore not be removed in the United States. Google did make the unprecedented decision, in the wake of an attack on the US embassy in Libya that killed four US Americans including ambassador Chris Stevens and in the face of increasing protests, to block the video in Libya, Egypt, Indonesia, and India (Rosen, 2012).

To further limit information, some governments also block access to foreign news or information from human rights organizations (Faris & Zittrain, 2009). Blocking software can now also limit access to translation sites, which a person could use to get around the filtering since most of the information that is blocked is in the native language(s) of the country. This was the case in Bahrain, which blocked access to Google Translate in 2009. Web access can also be limited due to security reasons. In 2009, the US Marines announced that soldiers would no longer have access to social media networks because they can lead to cyberattacks or allow people to leak information. Some of the major critiques of this practice include the collusion of corporations who own certain Internet platforms with governments that block content. For example, a company could turn over, at the request of a government, logs or archives of information about the Internet use of a dissident. At the request of the Chinese government, Yahoo! turned over e-mail records of three people, which led to their arrest. Additionally, people have raised concerns about the fact that US companies supply many of these countries, with whom the United States doesn’t have a relationship or with whom those relations are strained, with the software that is then used in ways that go against US and UN policies for the protection of free speech and human rights (Deibert, 2008).

Surveillance

Electronic espionage has been around since communication technologies like the telegraph, sound-recording devices, and radios were invented. Many countries, including the United States, have long had limitations on and protections against the use of electronic **surveillance** on US citizens, but after 9/11, these restrictions have been lessened, loosely interpreted, or only selectively enforced. With new media come new opportunities for electronic surveillance. Internet based “wiretaps”—the unauthorized and unknown monitoring or collection of e-mail, web-surfing data, or even keyboard strokes—are now employed, and that information may be shared with law enforcement or intelligence agencies (Deibert, 2008).

Such surveillance techniques are not just used by government or intelligence agencies; they are also used by companies. If you’re like many others and me, you are now used to clicking “accept” on those lengthy terms of use agreements and privacy policies without looking at them. What we may not know (and may not care about) is that who or whatever is asking us for our agreement or disagreement may want to track our usage of their program or product. Sometimes this tracking is meant to improve the functionality of the product or to connect us with services that we or the program has identified as useful to or relevant for us. The amount of data that exists on each one of us is now astounding, and more web users are demanding that browsers and other Internet services allow them to either opt out of tracking or monitor who is tracking them. A recent “add-on” called Collusion for Mozilla’s Firefox has received attention for allowing users to visualize who is tracking them in real time.[4]

The transition from the one-way broadcasts of the analogue age to the interactive dialogues of the digital era has fundamentally reshaped the democratic landscape. As we have seen, new media offers unprecedented avenues for political engagement, citizen journalism, and the dismantling of traditional gatekeeping. Yet, this "democratizing potential" is not a guaranteed outcome; it is a site of constant struggle. The same tools that empower a historian to reach millions or a dissident to bypass state media also facilitate sophisticated surveillance, algorithmic control, and corporate "walled gardens."

Ultimately, the shift to digital media has not erased the ethical dilemmas of the past but has instead amplified them. Whether through the lens of intellectual property rights, government content filtering, or the persistent digital divide, the evolution of new media reflects our ongoing societal negotiation between the desire for total connectivity and the need for privacy, security, and equity. As we move forward, the challenge lies in ensuring that the "dialogue" of new media remains truly inclusive, resisting the pull of new forms of censorship to protect the foundational principle of free speech in a digital world.

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11.3: Masspersonal Communication in Practice

Imagine your entire life—your private conversations, your financial records, your political leanings, and even your physical movements—condensed into a single device in your pocket. In the analogue era, our private lives were stored in physical drawers and our public personas were reserved for specific stages. Today, that distinction has vanished. We have entered the age of masspersonal communication, a hybrid reality where a private text can instantly become a public broadcast and a casual "like" can feed a global data-mining engine. As we transition from one-way broadcasts to interactive digital dialogues, we aren't just changing how we talk; we are redefining the very nature of privacy, identity, and democracy itself. To understand the practical implications of masspersonal communication, let us consider how it impacts some of the interpersonal practices and concepts we have already learned about in previous chapters.

Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships are the *relationships that we form with people we see in the media*. In the mass media era, these relationships were limited to celebrities that we watched on film or television, or even characters in books that we read. Today, however, the line between social and parasocial relationships is blurred, particularly on social media platforms where we communicate in a mediated environment with people that we also interact with offline.

As established in prior Units, communication is necessary in order to establish meaningful relationships. However, Hartmann (2016) notes that when our relationships with people, even those we know offline, are conducted more through social media than through face-to-face interactions, we begin to treat those relationships as being para-social. We no longer see the other person as a part of our offline reality. Instead, we begin to idealize them in the same way that we would idealize our favorite television or film star. Consequently, these relationships can become toxic by distorting our sense of reality and warping our self-image.

Research shows that people who use social media, under any circumstance, even in moderation, tend to suffer from the experience (Riehm, et al., 2019). This effect reportedly happens because most users of social media purposely misrepresent themselves in the best possible light. Users heighten the sense of envy or shame that others feel when they view posts, and eliminate the vulnerability that relational communication depends on as a means of both soliciting and sharing support with others. If we begin to reduce our complex social relationships with family and friends to a series of parasocial exchanges, then we may be losing our ability to relate to those people as genuine human beings.

Impression Management

Overall, some of the behaviors described in the development and maintenance of self-concept have taken on new forms in the era of masspersonal communication. Uses of new media to promote personal brands, lifestyle blogs, and other content focused on health and beauty have expanded reach, as have professional editing technologies previously reserved for mass media (McLean et al., 2015). Airbrushing, a process through which images are digitally edited after being captured, used to be reserved only for magazines and billboards. Today, this type of editing can be done by anyone, leading impressionable people to compare themselves negatively to what they think are genuine images of other people similar to them (Lincoln & Robards, 2017).

Image editing is not the only way that people are able to manage others' impressions of them using social media. Many people now engage in adaptive forms of impression management behaviors even when first deciding what content they post to their social media, in effect acting as arbiters of what information about their lives they want people to see, and when. Some people do this by annotating their media content with captions, images, or tags to shape the audience's perceptions of what they post or by omitting any information that is not consistent with the brand identity they have created for themselves (Lincoln & Robards, 2017).

On the other hand, masspersonal communication also presents new challenges to impression management. A key difference in the affordances of the tightly controlled mass media of old and the new media used today for masspersonal communication is that on social media, interpersonal messages meant for one person could be unintentionally broadcasted to a large audience of recipients. This mistake can happen simply by clicking the wrong button. Perhaps, you or someone you know may have hit "reply all" to a message meant for only one person, or have posted a message in a public feed composed for only one intended recipient.

The examples above illustrate one of the challenges for masspersonal communicators. In masspersonal communication, most of our interactions are documentable, and therefore they have more permanence. **Permanence** refers to *how permanent a message*

is when it is shared online. A hurtful exchange that takes place between two people arguing offline exists afterward only in the memory of those present. When two people argue with each other via email, text, social media, or even some teleconferencing platforms, those arguments become documented exchanges that can exist forever. They can reside on the platforms' servers, your local disk storage, or potentially in the public view if you or the interlocutor decide to share the exchange publicly (Pesce & Noto, 2016).

When a single message meant for an individual recipient is relayed via an open channel, it is possible, indeed likely, that we may experience what is called **context collapse** (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Context collapse occurs *when different people, who know you in different contexts, receive a message you are sending to a specific intended audience and then misinterpret that message by decoding outside of the context in which it was encoded*. For example, imagine the misinterpretation that could occur if a friend posted a picture of you drinking heavily at a college party to your LinkedIn profile on the day of an important job interview, which your prospective employer immediately sees. What may have been intended as a nostalgic message from one friend might look to your prospective employer like a recent photo displaying your present lifestyle.

Hogan (2010) explains that because of the greater potential audience for online exchanges we tend to be more sensitive to what Goffman called facework. **Facework** is the *work of maintaining our reputation in front of others*. The result of the public/private dynamic of new media is that we are all more inclined to engage in facework, including a tendency to reply to messages that we might otherwise ignore.

The increased work required to maintain our face online may actually make us more inclined to escalating styles of conflict. New studies show that while new media may make conflict easier to avoid, people who communicate through social media are typically more inclined to escalate conflicts than they would face-to-face (Brady et al., 2017). In part, this has to do with the physical distance that removes us from immediate bodily harm in such exchanges, but it is also a product of the meshed public/private arena where even an exchange of text messages could be shared with a broader audience making every interaction online a matter of impression management.

Privacy

One of the major concerns about the popularity of masspersonal communication, especially among young people, has to do with privacy (Vitak, 2012) and the widespread use of mobile technologies. Because we can now take our personal phones with us into public spaces, conversations that are meant for the private arena may be taking place with an unknown and unintended audience present.

More concerning is the access that our smartphones provide to confidential online files or interfaces. Through our applications, we communicate with many people, organizations, governments, and even AI programs. All of these interactions leave traces on our phones that reveal much about our identities. If someone steals your cell phone and bypasses security measures, they could have full access to your private emails, texts, voice messages, recordings, documents, and browser history. They could also gain access to your bank records, tax information, and even how many steps you walk on an average day.

Notice that in modern spy movies, secret agents are breaking into the files of the KGB, they're downloading cell phone and laptop hard drives in order to uncover a cornucopia of information that in bygone eras were stored physically in a broad array of different places.

The wealth of information that your phone provides reflects the fact that our communication reveals a great deal about who we are. It is for this reason that governments, hackers, corporations, and advertisers are all so interested in the data that accumulates from the masspersonal interactions we have using networked devices.

This *process of compiling a nuanced record of user behavior in a profile that is then sold to others* is called **data mining,** and it occurs most readily through social media sites like Facebook, which depend on the sale of user data as a prime source of income (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). Data mining is only possible because of the expanded memory capacity of new media technologies.

All of our interactions online, right down to the keystrokes we choose, are recorded and documented by the companies who provide the hardware, software, websites, and applications that we use every day. Once our data is available to people with the right tools to analyze it, many facets of our identities can be interpreted in order to create what is called a **psychographic profile**. These profiles are used to determine what kinds of messages we are likely to respond to, and in what ways.

Years ago, advertisers focused on the use of demographics as a way of grouping together potential customers based on shared

factors like age, race, income, marital status, or education. These broad categories were used to help segment a market of consumers into groups in order for advertisers to decide what types of messages might be most appealing to their target customers.

Today, this approach to advertising has been greatly refined because advertisers no longer need to guess at what groups of people may or may not like. Using the psychographic profile of a specific consumer, they can determine exactly what message that individual consumer is most likely to find appealing, which enables them to tailor their advertisements to meet that person's disposition.

While virtually all interactions online are now part of the public record, concerns over privacy are amplified in the case of social interaction because the data derived from these exchanges is being constantly mined and analyzed by big data analysts. These analysts refine the individual online profiles that exist for each of us, which are used not only by retailers tapping into our psyche as a way of selling products (De Corniero & De Nijs, 2016), but now also by special interest groups, and even foreign governments trying to influence your behavior.

The reason that concerns about data mining are greater for social interactions than just individual online activity is that in an exchange with another person your information is more easily recorded given that it is exposed to data miners monitoring either of the people involved. Though young people frequently express concerns about how their masspersonal communication may impact the security of their private information, very few feel empowered to stop their masspersonal practices (Hargitai & Marwick, 2016).

Ultimately, the transition to masspersonal communication has turned our daily interactions into a high-stakes balancing act. As we have seen, the convenience of the smartphone comes at a cost: the risk of context collapse, where a private moment is misinterpreted by a public audience, and the creation of psychographic profiles that turn our personal dispositions into commodities for data miners. We find ourselves caught between the desire for genuine human connection and the pressure to maintain "face" through airbrushed images and curated brands. As the line between our social and parasocial worlds continues to thin, the challenge lies in reclaiming our agency. By understanding the permanence of our digital footprints and the mechanics of impression management, we can better protect our privacy and ensure that our technology serves to enhance, rather than distort, our genuine human relationships.

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11.4: Mediated Communication Competence

Masspersonal communication has greatly complicated the ability to communicate competently in the more dynamic new media era. In Chapter 1, you learned about the transmission and transactional models of communication. Think about how masspersonal communication relates to those models. When we mediate our interpersonal interactions through the use of digital devices, we reduce the richness of our channels, making it easier for us to misinterpret the relational meanings behind the content we are seeing, and making it harder for others to interpret the meaning of our replies (Kelly & Miller-Ott, 2018). Masspersonal communication blends the affordances of online and offline channels, giving us more work to do when encoding and decoding messages because it is harder for us to anticipate what types of noise might occur.

How do you enact conversational management, for example, during a group text? Is it rude to be typing when you can see from the little gray bubbles that someone else may be typing too? Are you adequately involved if your reply comes two hours late? On the other hand, you may have other conversations taking place at the same time offline, do they get first priority? These types of questions reflect the complex demands of masspersonal communication.

Appriopriateness

To begin our discussion, let us consider the new questions raised about what constitutes appropriateness when communicating in a masspersonal way. As we learned earlier in the book, appropriateness is a key component of competent communication. However, appropriateness, like other aspects of communication, is highly contextual. We already know that context collapse can affect impression management by exposing our messages to scrutiny from people other than our intended audience. There are implications regarding what people consider to be appropriate or ethical acts of communication due to the permanence of our masspersonal interactions.

For example, consider the routine use of X by American President Donald Trump where he fires cabinet members, negotiates trade deals, and even threatens war (Boczkowski & Papacharissi, 2018). Before Twitter made it possible for a President to speak directly to the American people just by typing into a cell phone, these kinds of decisions were typically announced through formal meetings with the invited press, and after much vetting and consideration. Nevertheless, President Trump does not view himself as announcing information. Instead, he is relaying personal news to a wide range of followers, sometimes using hashtags to indicate that he is replying to a specific person. Is it appropriate to relay personal news, even when it has broader implications for everyone else on the planet?

Another example would be Prince Harry's decision in 2020 to announce he was stepping down from the British Royal family via Instagram. This type of announcement used to be conveyed via a formal proclamation issued by the Queen through her own administrators. However, Harry and his wife decided to inform everyone by posting it on their social media pages (Booth & Adam, 2020). This announcement resulted in a raucous public debate about the propriety of using social media to broadcast information. This behavior was suggested to be unorthodox because it was not possible until recently. The question remains, however, whether such behavior will ultimately be accepted as appropriate. What do you think?

Management

Another gray area regarding communication competence in the masspersonal era has to do with how we manage conversations. Prior to mobile networked technologies, it was far easier to segment your conversations. If you were in conversation with someone, you could close doors, ignore a ringing phone, and give your attention to that person. Today, we are receiving more messages in more ways at more times. Not only that, but many of us use alerts and notifications on our devices that are designed to draw our attention (Carr, 2011). Turkle's (2011) extensive research concluded that all these competing bids for our attention have altered our social expectations. We are more forgiving today of distracted listeners in a face to face conversation, but more demanding of immediate responses from people we communicate with online.

Clarity and Intent

Questions of clarity and intent are also complicated when communicating in a masspersonal way. In prior chapters, we discussed how verbal and nonverbal communication cues help us to interpret messages at either a denotative (content) or connotative

(relational) level. These interpretive practices apply to the masspersonal realm. In fact, some text-based icons were intentionally created to bridge the gap between the verbal and non-verbal affordances of new media technologies. The emoticon is the most prominent example of this.

The **emoticons** (or emojis) that we now use frequently in our texts and emails were invented to provide a digital form of a nonverbal cue. They accompany the text of our message in order to help the receiver contextualize what we are saying using our typical nonverbal cues (i.e. kinesics, vocalics, etc.). Before emojis were created, text-based messages were subject to a lot of miscommunication due to the difficulty of reading the connotative (relational) meanings of what was being said. The purpose of the original emojis was to provide a facial cue that would signal to the receiver what tone the sender was intending. Today, emojis have evolved into a language of their own- all of which is, again, based on cultural contexts (Kelly & Miller-Ott, 2018).

Let us look deeper into verbal and nonverbal communication practices, and how they have been affected or adapted in the era of masspersonal communication.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is increasing today because of new media. Phone calls, meetings, and private catch-up sessions are all possible through text-based modes of communication like email, texting, and social media. This reliance on mediated communication increases the odds of miscommunication at the relational level. It can be equally confusing at the denotative level due to the rapidly changing use of language by young people in the United States (Thurlow, 2017).

Text speak is one of the ways that language is evolving in the masspersonal era. Because people rely more on abbreviated text-based messages sent at random intervals throughout the day as a way of communicating with others, there is also a greater emphasis on brevity in messages. To reduce word and character counts in the messages we send, many of us employ language codes for common phrases we call text speak. Examples of text speak include BRB for 'be right back', TTYL for 'talk to you later', or the most well known of all: LOL for 'laughing out loud' (Dixon, 2011). As proof of the bridging qualities of masspersonal communication, text speak is no longer just reserved for text-based messages. People have begun using text speak when they talk out loud to others (Head, 2011).

This new coding of language, paired with the emojis that often accompany such messages for context, has created new demands for competent communication in the masspersonal era. Many of the youngest people in society find themselves more adept at textspeak than their elders, despite falling behind in their ability to communicate in standard English in their classrooms (Shlowiy, 2014). Meanwhile, many older people are struggling to manage their feelings of ineptitude when trying to communicate masspersonally, even though they have long considered themselves competent speakers of the English language.

Some studies suggest that today's college graduates are less literate than they were a decade ago thanks to the rise of text speak and the formatting limitations of many social media sites (Mallow & Lister, 2016; Graff, 2017). For people born before the 1990s, standard education included rigorous schooling on grammar and spelling. Once spell check became popular, the emphasis among students likely lessened. By the mid-nineties, as students everywhere began carrying computers with them to class, research shows a precipitous slide in spelling and grammar skills. Most young people consider spelling and grammar trivial factors in their ability to communicate (Perry et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this view is not shared by everyone.

Thurlow (2017) points out that while young employees might not realize it, co-workers consider proper spelling to be a primary factor in message clarity, even when they can understand the intended meaning. More importantly, older workers are equally inclined to consider literacy skills to be a critical reflection of overall job competence, meaning that textspeak could lead to job termination (Thurlow, 2017).

Other studies find that grammatical and spelling errors can even impact your ability to find a mate, because spelling and grammar can take on greater importance when searching for a date through online sites (Van der Zanden, et al., 2019). Most alarmingly, research also shows that in the healthcare field, people have died as a result of workers misunderstanding one another because of their use of text speak on the job (Head, 2011).

Non-Verbal Communication

Almost all elements of nonverbal communication have been affected in some way by the augmented reality of new media. In this section, we consider some key aspects.

Chronemics

Our concept of chronemics has seen major changes due to masspersonal communication. The same nonverbal codes that were once given priority in western culture (timeliness, promptness, and synchronicity), have been replaced by the affordances of new media that emphasize efficiency, speed, and dexterity (Doring & Poschel, 2017). How often have you panicked because you were running late to meet a friend in a public place, and you're worried they might leave in a huff before you get there? Before cell phones were ordinary, this was a significant concern. Now that most people can relay last-minute messages to each other, even after they have left for their destinations, timeliness is valued differently.

Consider, for example, the question of time as it relates to an interpersonal interaction. In a face-to-face interaction, we are in a **synchronous** dynamic- meaning that everything is happening at the same time. An **asynchronous** dynamic would be something like writing letters, where a sender writes their letter at a different time from when the receiver reads it. These distinctions were straightforward in the past, but in a masspersonal setting, we no longer know for sure whether our communication is synchronous or not. If I send a text message, you might be reading it immediately, or you may not see it until later. We may even be in the middle of sending messages in a seemingly synchronous exchange only for one person to get distracted and disengage without the other person knowing it (Lim, 2017).

As a result of the hybridization of online and offline identities, some researchers say that we now live in what is called an **augmented reality,** where our identities are expressed in equally essential ways online and offline at the same time, all the time (Jurgensen, 2012). Part of this augmented reality means that we are never fully disengaged from online communication. The newly networked society that makes us more connected than ever also means that many employers no longer demand that their employers work the same standardized business hours in the same physical place. We can see that the shifts in chronemics now impact the changing expectations regarding proxemics (Doring & Poschel, 2017).

Proxemics

Are we together or apart? Does distance matter as much today as it used to when it comes to mediated communication? If I can reach you equally quickly via text message, whether you are standing beside me, or climbing K2, what difference does it make? It turns out that we may be inclined to want more physical space in a masspersonal era because we are not as used to having to share space in the same way.

Face-to-face communication is waning in the twenty-first century, especially as we become a more global society with social ties reaching across further distances as a result of people moving for personal or professional reasons. Bridging the geographic gap that used to interrupt interpersonal communication is the popularity of masspersonal communication, which takes place primarily through social media platforms and through networked mobile phone use (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2017).

The trend of people moving more readily in this century is partially driven by the affordances of new media technology which augment our social interactions, so that our relationships with people who live far away are easier to maintain now than they might have been before. Thanks to social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok we can still communicate regularly with people no matter where they live in the world, so long as they have access to the internet. This concept is called **networked connectivity**, which means people today view the internet as more than just a channel through which they communicate, they view it as an essential precondition to their ability to communicate (Papacharissi, 2010).

When someone we know loses access to the internet, we may revert to thinking of them in the same way that people did in the mid-twentieth century when their family members traveled overseas to places where they were inaccessible by phone (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2017).

Much of our modern communication is mediated by our digital devices, and researchers have begun to study the relationships we have with them. Prominent among these researchers is Sherry Turkle (2011), who found in her studies of mobile phone usage that young people in the twenty-first century viewed themselves as tethered to their digital devices. Tethering**,** as Turkle uses it, means that the devices were no longer considered to be just machines like a toaster or a photocopier. Instead, people today view their cell phones as an extension of themselves that is essential to their ability to function in society.

Space

Physical media objects like records, books, magazines, and documents have been replaced by cloud culture, where digital versions of 'things' are now easily acquired and stored. As a result, the design of physical spaces has been re-thought, with the modern apartment and housing developments making space for home offices and digital interfaces where physical storage of objects might have been (Hauser et al., 2005).

The digitalization of media has also increased consumer demand for electric sockets to keep electronics powered, as well as the demand (and price) of computer and phone accessories like headphones (Shugan, 2018). Consider how much more noise there is today, with every person able to carry their music or movie collections on a device that also functions as a TV, phone, and teleconferencing device. For this reason, spaces are being designed to allow individuals more space to be as Turkle (2011) says, "alone together."

Vocalics

In concert with the ways that our perception of shared space is affected by the affordances of new media, we also have new conceptions of vocalics in the masspersonal era. When we are alone together, as Turkle (2011) describes it, we either gather in public spaces only to ignore those around us so that we can communicate online, or else we gather in a digital 'community' while isolating ourselves physically by remaining in separate locations. The result of this is that the noise we used to expect in large gathering spaces like a park, or even a party is much reduced today, while in other spaces where noise used to be kept at a minimum people are now able to talk, watch movies, or listen to music.

Ask yourself this: is it rude to speak aloud in a library? At one time, it was considered inconsiderate to speak at anything more than a whisper inside a library, but today with everyone sporting earbuds attached to their phones, some people are less concerned about whether their voices are disrupting other people's peace. In their minds, people who want to tune out our conversations can just plug in their earbuds and literally turn up the volume to block out the sound. This type of logic may be useful to some, but what about the now nostalgic concept of shared silence. In a masspersonal era where people have individual control over the sounds they can put in their ears, there seems to be less and less value attached to the ability to hear nothing at all (Smith et al., 2018).

Haptics

People who grew up prior to the advent of new media might never have guessed just how much their ability to communicate would someday depend on their sense of touch. Today we constantly type to send messages to one another through email, text, and touch screen interactions. Our sense of touch was once studied primarily in terms of the touch between living beings. However, haptic scholars have renewed their consideration of the touch between people and things in order to study the ways we use our sense of touch to manipulate networked digital devices (Parisi, 2018).

In the masspersonal context, we should remember that our touch screen technologies demand more from our abilities to touch. People with less nimble control over their fingers may struggle with touchscreen keyboards, or with functions like zoom that require specific motions of the hand. For those with poor hand-eye coordination, the ability to type on mobile devices can result in many spelling errors, sometimes changing the meanings of messages sent. This can also be a hindrance to message receivers.

As young people have become more and more inclined to communicate through images rather than words in masspersonal exchanges, the haptic demands of phone-usage have increased. In order to view images sent via text, users have to pincer their fingers on images, press harder to select them, and manipulate their hands in more complicated ways. Each of these activities requires dexterity that may be limited for some users (Gordon & Zhai, 2019).

As this unit illustrates, interpersonal communication remains highly relevant online or offline. In the age of new media, we find ourselves adapting all the same principles and techniques we use when we interact interpersonally to our interactions online, making this period a masspersonal era. As you reflect on what you have learned in this chapter, bear in mind that the technologies we discuss here are still developing, and their impact is not yet fully understood. Part of the fun of masspersonal communication is that it is new and adaptive. However, using lessons from the past, we can at least begin to chart some of the methods that we can succeed as communicators despite the new challenges that face us.

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11.5: Chapter 11 Summary

Mediated Communication Review

Key idea

Masspersonal communication blends interpersonal and mass communication, collapsing boundaries between private and public, synchronous and asynchronous, and social and parasocial interactions.

Core shifts in communication norms

- From nonverbal priority to efficiency: Traditional cues like timeliness, promptness, and synchronicity have been de-emphasized; new media valorize efficiency, speed, and dexterity (Döring & Pöschel, 2017).
- Synchronous vs. asynchronous blur: A text may be read instantly or hours later, making it unclear when an interaction is "live" and complicating turn-taking and expectations.
- Networked "tethering": Constant alerts and notifications fragment attention and make conversation management harder (Carr, 2011; Turkle, 2011).

Language, codes, and competence

- Text speak and emojis: Abbreviations (BRB, TTYL, LOL) and emojis supply missing context cues and have migrated into spoken language.
- Generational competence gap: Younger users may excel at textspeak but lag in standard English; older users feel less adept in masspersonal settings despite strong traditional literacy.
- Literacy concerns: Evidence suggests declines in grammar/spelling associated with textspeak and platform constraints; older coworkers often see literacy as a proxy for competence, with job implications.

Permanence and context collapse

- Documentability: Digital exchanges (texts, DMs, emails, posts) are stored and potentially permanent on devices/servers, raising stakes for everyday missteps.
- Context collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011): Messages intended for one audience are decoded by others in different roles/contexts, leading to misinterpretation and reputational harm.
- Example scenario: A party photo posted to a professional space (e.g., LinkedIn) can be decoded as current lifestyle by an employer.

Impression management, facework, and conflict

- Facework intensifies online (Hogan, 2010): Larger potential audiences increase self-presentation work and pressure to respond.
- Conflict dynamics: Physical distance and audience effects can make social-media conflicts more likely to escalate compared to face-to-face (Brady et al., 2017).

Managing conversations in the masspersonal age

- Attention competition: Multiple channels and constant pings make it difficult to give undivided attention; segmentation (closing doors/ignoring calls) is harder.
- Evolving etiquette: Ambiguous availability and read-receipts complicate expectations about responsiveness and "who has the floor."

Public/private boundary examples

- Institutional announcements via social platforms: Prince Harry's 2020 Instagram post about stepping back from royal duties sparked debate about propriety—illustrating shifting norms and contested appropriateness.

New media, society, and democracy (contextual backdrop)

- McLuhan's insight: Media and society are co-constitutive; studying one requires studying the other.
- Democratizing potential vs. unequal participation: New media lower barriers and increase interactivity, but heavy participation skews toward certain demographics; access and representation problems persist.
- Citizen journalism and gatewatching: Blogs and newsletters can shape public discourse and push mainstream coverage, illustrating alternative paths around traditional gatekeepers.
- Censorship and platform power: Governments and platforms can filter, block, or hand over user data, raising concerns about surveillance and corporate-state collusion.

Ethical and practical takeaways

- Communication competence now includes: knowing audience dynamics, anticipating permanence, managing impression across contexts, and maintaining clarity despite reduced nonverbal cues.
- Privacy is precarious: Treat most digital interactions as potentially public and permanent.
- Strategic code-switching: Balance textspeak/emojis for efficiency and rapport with standard language for professionalism and clarity.

Quick self-check questions

- Audience: Who could realistically see this message beyond the intended recipient(s)?
- Permanence: Would I be comfortable with this message resurfacing years later?
- Tone and cues: Do I need an emoji or explicit wording to avoid misinterpretation?
- Appropriateness: Is this channel suitable for the content (e.g., personal vs. institutional)?
- Attention: Can I reduce notifications or switch modes to manage parallel conversations more ethically?

Key terms to remember

- Masspersonal communication, synchronicity/asynchronicity, textspeak, impression management, facework, context collapse, documentability/permanence, gatewatching, citizen journalism.

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12: PUBLIC SPEAKING

12.1: A Brief History of Public Speaking
12.2: Why Speak Publically
12.3: The Purposes of Public Speaking
12.4: Chapter 12 Summary

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12.1: A Brief History of Public Speaking

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define rhetoric and explain why public speaking is essential to democratic self-governance.
- Identify and briefly summarize key historical developments and figures in rhetoric (e.g., Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian; Middle Ages, Renaissance, Belles Lettres, Elocutionary Movement, Gilded Age).
- Describe and apply Aristotle's three modes of proof (ethos, pathos, logos) to analyze or plan a speech.
- Distinguish general speech purposes (inform, persuade, entertain, special occasion) and select appropriate types/strategies (e.g., report, demonstration, explanation; beliefs/attitudes/actuation) while upholding ethical standards.

Since humans have been using language and living in social groups, the act of one person speaking to many has been occurring in some form or other. Whether it was to instruct, to persuade, to motivate, to celebrate, or to mourn, language is the tool humans use to form and maintain social connections. Even though we know public speaking is as old as language itself, in our Western culture, we typically consider the foundations of our current understanding of public speaking to have been laid in Ancient Greece, more than 2,500 years ago.

Dr. Peter A. DeCaro of the University of Fairbanks, Alaska, lays out the development of public speaking from the Greeks and Romans, through the Renaissance, and into our Modern Period. What follows is a condensed, summarized version of Dr. DeCaro's work.

Public Speaking and Democracy

The development of public speaking as a specific skill is strongly linked to the development of democracy in Ancient Greece. Starting in 621 B.C. in Athens, laws began to convert from an oral tradition heavily controlled by nobility to a written form that could be applied equally and consistently. This codification (creating an organized system of laws) took power from the nobility and moved it into the courts. Assemblies were formed to review, revise, and create laws. Accordingly, there had to be substantive debate and persuasion to reach agreements on how to manage this evolution of legal doctrine, and those coming before the courts needed to engage in public speaking to advocate for their position. Democracy demands public speaking as the tool for self-governance. Since being proficient in public speaking was so valuable, the study of how it works likewise became important, emerging as the study of rhetoric.

The Athenian Greeks and Aristotle

Widely considered the founder of the study of rhetoric, **Aristotle** (384-322 B.C.), Image 1, was the first philosopher to consider the dynamics of public speaking and persuasion, and to compile those observations in *The Rhetoric*. In effect, this became the first textbook on public speaking. Aristotle defined rhetoric as "all available means of persuasion." In other words, **rhetoric** and **rhetorical theory** refer to *the study of techniques for persuasion as they apply to various audiences and occasions*.

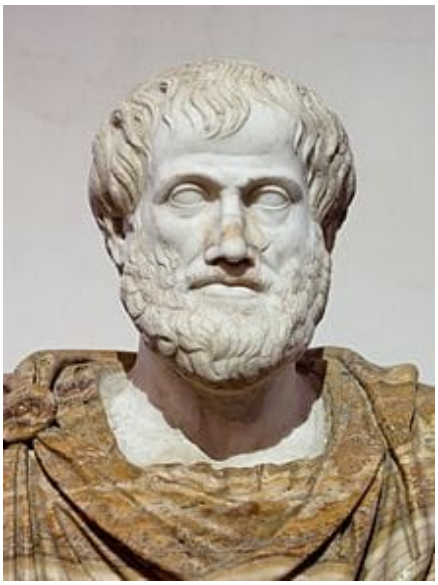


Figure 12.1.1: Image 1

In his work, Aristotle presented three methods, or "modes," of persuading an audience. We still consider these Aristotelian modes of proof as the core of how we teach and study persuasion.

Ethos: *persuading another based on the character of the speaker*. We all have friends or family members we trust, and if they tell us something, we assume they are telling the truth and should be believed. This persuasion by the nature of the speaker's character is ethos.

A very important aspect of ethos is that credibility is something audience *gives* the speaker. Since the audience can judge the character of the speaker only on their performance at that moment, the speaker's credibility is a function of the perception the audience has of that speaker at that time. No matter how trustworthy and honest a speaker is, their credibility is only as strong as the audience believes it to be. Accordingly, speakers need to prove their trustworthiness through their delivery and content. Since this is a standard consideration in the development of a speech introduction, specific methods of enhancing credibility are addressed in chapter 14.

Pathos: *engaging the emotions of the audience*. Human beings are deeply emotional creatures, and we are most emotionally comfortable when our beliefs and actions align. If James believes giving to the community is an important activity, that may lead him to donate blood during the college blood drive. He may feel a sense of satisfaction and contentment that his actions and beliefs aligned. On the other hand, if he avoids giving blood, he may feel troubled that his actions are not aligning with his beliefs. This disconnect is at the core of using emotion to persuade.

Humans like feeling positive emotions and don't like negative emotions. A speaker can offer an audience a way to act that will make them feel good and avoid negative emotion. For example, a famous charity advertisement for Feed the Children claimed, "For the price of a cup of coffee, you can feed a starving child." This simple statement aims to trigger a sense of guilt each time we buy a cup of coffee, and then offers a way to erase the negative emotion of guilt and replace it with the satisfaction of helping those less fortunate: donate your coffee money to Feed the Children.

Logos: *using argument and logical reasoning*. While we are deeply emotional creatures, we also place a high value on rational thinking and thoughtful decision making. Through the application of logical reasoning accompanied by credible evidence, we aim to persuade the audience of the best course of action. The study of logic and reasoning are huge fields of study in their own right, and we encourage you to consider additional courses in Logic, Argumentation, or Debate.

The Romans

After the time of the Athenian Greeks passed and the Roman Republic emerged, two Romans emerged to make significant impacts on the study of rhetoric: Cicero and Quintilian.

Cicero (106-43 B.C.), Image 2, argued for a balance of content and delivery, that "the perfect orator should be able to speakwisely

and eloquently on any subject with a dignified, restrained delivery." He also believed, however, that style without substance was to be avoided. DeCaro states, "Cicero despised the shallowness of orators who depended exclusively on perfect diction and elegant words that lacked substance. His ideal person was the philosopher-statesman-learned orator who used rhetoric to mold public opinion." Cicero's importance lies in his writings. DeCaro explains, "His work on rhetoric, the *Institutio Oratoria*, is an exhaustive volume of twelve books and was a major contribution to education theory and literary criticism."

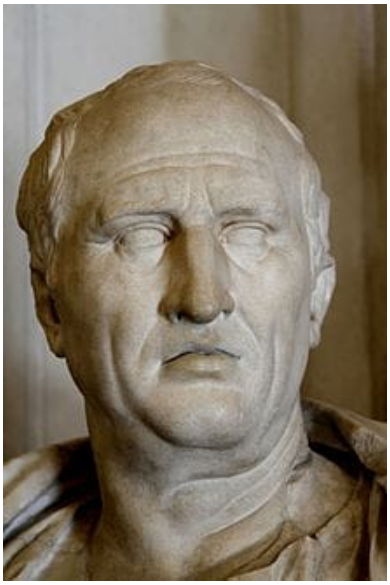


Figure 12.1.2: Image 2

Quintilian (35-95 A.D.), Image 3, wrote extensively on speaking, style, and content. He organized what we now know and teach as the five canons of rhetoric:

1. **Invention**: compiling the content of the speech.
2. **Disposition**: arranging the content in an effective order.
3. **Style**: the wording of the presentation.
4. **Memorization**: knowing the presentation and content thoroughly.
5. **Delivery**: the presentation of the content.

Quintilian's five canons reference both content and delivery, acknowledging that both are important to the success of the persuasion. As Quintilian stated, rhetoric was "the good man speaking well." In other words, effective public speaking combined substantive, ethical content with good, effective delivery.



Figure 12.1.3: Image 3

The Middle Ages

As the Roman Empire fell and Europe moved into the Middle Ages (400-1400 A.D.), Christianity grew in power and supplanted the human-centered philosophies of the Greeks and Romans. While rhetoric was still considered one of the three great liberal arts during this time, along with logic and grammar, due to Christianity's distrust of the field, rhetorical theory did not advance significantly during this time. DeCaro states, "As Christianity grew in power, rhetoric was condemned as a pagan art."

The Renaissance

During the 14th-16th centuries, a revival of interest in classical culture occurred. This renaissance of culture led to a revisiting of the works of the Greeks and Romans, including the works of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and others. Art, philosophy, literature, and all manner of human endeavor flourished. There was a strong interest in both art and science, with each claiming prominence in discerning truth, justice, and beauty. The **humanists** believed that language and art could reveal the inner world of the human experience, while the **rationalists** believed that through science, truth would be revealed. Poetry, prose, rhetoric, and philosophy were paramount to the humanists as they believed that through the creation and study of these works, truths of the human condition could be discovered. The rationalists, on the other hand, had little regard for such human expression. Evidence, logic, and reason were the focus of the rationalists. They felt that through scientific inquiry, the truths of the natural world could be discerned.

1600-1800

During this time, Western Culture began the transition into the political and social structures we have today. Democratic rule began to re-emerge, nobility rule began to wane, and a dispassionate, equitable structure of courts and laws took the place of the rule of the social elites. During this time, as these social and political structures were evolving, new views of public speaking were also emerging.

The Epistemological Tradition: Epistemology is the study of how we know what we know. DaCaro describes it as "the study of the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge." The epistemological tradition looked at language as intertwined with human knowledge, perception, and thought. It emphasized the study of how language works, how persuasive appeals work, and the underlying psychology of communication.

The Belles Lettres Movement: The Belle Lettres Movement (meaning "fine or beautiful letters), focused on "the aesthetic qualities of writing rather than any informative value it may have" (DeCaro,) Great value was placed on beautiful writing and clear wording. In effect, how something was said was more important than the content of the message. This command of language was seen as a reflection of the author's status and education as well as the reader's: "Belle-lettres denotes a linguistic self-consciousness testifying to the superior education of both writer and reader, who come together more through literature than

through life" (Jehlen and Warner, 1997).

The Elocutionary Movement: The Elocutionary Movement was primarily focused on delivery. The Elocutionists used large, planned gestures, loud and dramatic vocal factors, and exaggerated movements. They believed that carefully planned delivery would have certain effects on the audience, so the emphasis was on finding the "proper" gesture, vocal pattern, or movement appropriate for a specific moment. Later, the Elocutionist Movement became so formulaic that it began to be perceived as fake and insincere.

The Gilded Age

From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, the ability to speak at length with an ornate style was held in high esteem. Politicians and traveling speakers would go from town to town delivering long, impassioned speeches on topics of the day. Since there was no mass media, other than newsprint, these were public events that would draw everyone in the community. Without microphones or sound systems, the speakers would use a loud, boisterous style, very much elocutionist in style, to carry their message throughout the audience.



Figure 12.1.4: Image 4

The ability to speak for hours in this style was considered a sign of intelligence and personal power, so speeches not measuring up were considered reflective of a lack of personal strength and character. A good speaker was expected to have a very strong command of language, much in the belles lettres style, and to be able to express himself with a sense of poetry and artistry. Debate was a very highly regarded skill, especially the ability to form well-phrased, targeted arguments. Besting another in an intellectual clash generated much respect.

Present Day Influences

Today, what we consider good public speaking has been altered by several factors from the 20th century. It has been heavily influenced by the introduction of radio, film, television, and the internet.



Figure 12.1.5: Image 5, History.com

First, radio introduced audiences to the ability to hear the natural voice of political figures in their own home. Most renowned are the “Fireside Chats” of President Franklin Roosevelt. According to History.com, “From March 1933 to June 1944, Roosevelt addressed the American people in some 30 speeches broadcast via radio, speaking on a variety of topics from banking to unemployment to fighting fascism in Europe. Millions of people found comfort and renewed confidence in these speeches, which became known as the 'fireside chats.' (History.com, 2010) Instead of the loud, projected vocal style needed to fill an auditorium, this new medium allowed a far more intimate, conversational style of presentation.

Second, putting an elocutionist-style speaker, such as William Jennings Bryan, in the close-up view of a movie enhanced the artificial nature of this style of delivery. Since such delivery was intended to reach an audience of several hundred without the aid of a sound system, to now show the speaker’s exaggerated vocal factors, gestures, facial expressions, and body movements up close via film or television made the speaker appear cartoonish by today's standards. Since we can now see speakers up close regardless of the size of the venue, a more natural delivery works more effectively at establishing trust and sincerity.

Third, now that we could not only hear but see the speakers, the nonverbal, visual elements of the speaker have become more pronounced. In the 1960 election, U.S. citizens saw the first televised presidential debate between John F. Kenney and Richard M. Nixon. A mark of the impact of this new medium of television is that those who listened via radio felt Nixon won the debate, while those who watched overwhelmingly felt Kennedy won: “Nixon was recovering from a hospital visit and had a 5-o'clock shadow, having refused makeup. In contrast, Kennedy's delivery was smooth and charismatic. Viewers focused on what they saw, not what they heard. Kennedy won the election” (Newsweek, 2016). Accordingly, “The Kennedy-Nixon debates not only had a major impact on the election’s outcome, but ushered in a new era in which crafting a public image and taking advantage of media exposure became essential ingredients of a successful political campaign” (History.com, 2010). The delivery aspects of public speaking, especially appearance, emerged as a far more crucial element than before.



Figure 12.1.6: Image 6, History.com

Fourth, with the emergence of the internet giving us 24/7 access to virtually all the knowledge in the world, speaker's words can be carefully assessed for accuracy. Instead of taking a speaker at their word, we can check and cross-check the truthfulness of a speaker's claims in a matter of moments. We have seen the emergence of fact-checking sites that specialize in holding speakers accountable for what they say. Politifact.com, FactCheck.org, and Snopes.com produce assessments daily of current claims by public figures. More than ever, speakers must carefully cite evidence and sources.



Figure 12.1.7: Image 7

Along with accurate citations, speakers must carefully weigh the value of the source itself. Since the internet allows for anyone to publish anything (there are no editors on the internet), speakers must evaluate sources to determine the trustworthiness of the source. We have seen the emergence of political commentators, such as Rush Limbaugh, Alex Jones, Rachel Maddow, or Keith Olbermann, who are advocates for specific viewpoints. We must be cautious of distorted or biased news and opinion, and instead focus on objective, balanced information.

Fifth, in addition to the emergence of the internet is the development of echo chambers fed by partisan, or even hyper-partisan, news and information sites. This means that more than ever different political viewpoints are fed by specific news sources. Typically, sources such as Fox News, The Wall Street Journal, and Nationalreview.com are considered conservative, while MSNBC, Huffington Post, and Salon.com are considered liberal. For us as speakers, it is important we have a sense of what the audience deems most acceptable. To cite Fox News with a liberal audience or MSNBC with a conservative audience may harm the speaker's credibility. In other words, there are sources some audience members immediately deem biased and lacking credibility, so if we use them, we may have created a barrier with the audience. Instead, to advance our position, we should look for sources that do

not carry such pre-existing baggage and are more likely to be seen as credible.

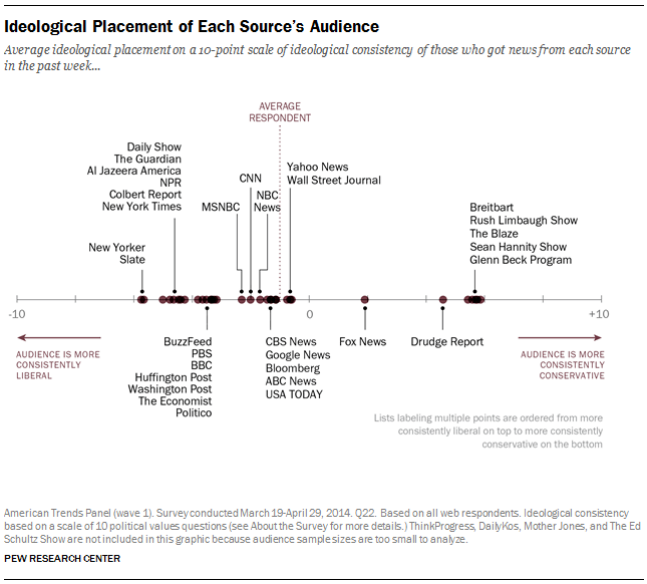


Figure 12.1.8: Image 8

Lastly, another effect of the internet has been little patience for engaging long discourse. Since the virtually infinite web always has something else to look at, we are becoming less and less satisfied with long, detailed presentations. This “Twitter Effect” pushes us to favor short, to-the-point presentations versus longer, exploratory speeches. CNN’s Doug Gross lays out 5 ways that Twitter is altering our relationship with information and how it is presented. He states, “Some thoughts just can't be summed up in 140 characters. For all its ability to provide quick blasts of information, critics have argued that Twitter dumbs down...conversations that deserve to be fuller and more fleshed out.” Accordingly, as speakers we need to be clear, distinct, and avoid rambling. Depending on the audience and occasion, a shorter, more direct presentation may work more effectively than a longer, more detailed speech.



Figure 12.1.9: Image 9

From the ancient assemblies of Athens to the rapid-fire digital landscape of the 21st century, the art of public speaking has continually adapted to society's shifting needs. While the boisterous, ornate styles of the Gilded Age have given way to a more intimate, conversational, and concise approach driven by radio, television, and the internet, the core principles of rhetoric remain as vital as ever. Whether navigating the "Twitter effect" of modern media or building credibility through the timeless modes of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, the contemporary speaker must balance historical wisdom with modern expectations. Ultimately, public speaking remains our most essential tool for self-governance and social connection, requiring a thoughtful blend of substance, sincerity, and strategic delivery to be truly effective in the modern world.

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12.2: Why Speak Publically

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.

The Nature of Public Speaking

Public speaking has three striking characteristics that set it off from interpersonal communication and small group communication.



Figure 12.2.1: Image 1

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.

The 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 12.2.2: Image 2

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.

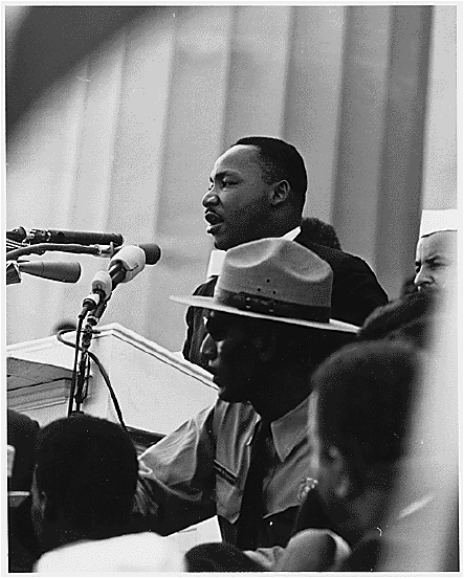


Figure 12.2.3: Image 3

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.



Figure 12.2.4: Image 4

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.

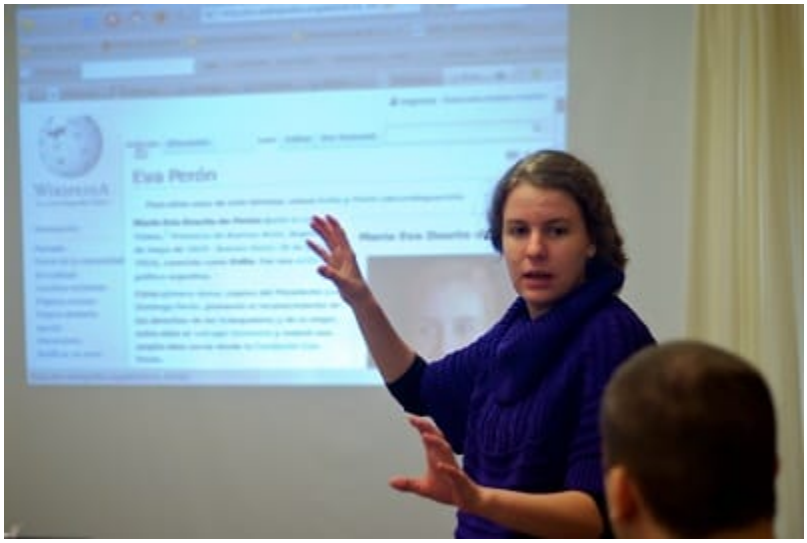


Figure 12.2.5: Image 5

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.

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12.3: The Purposes of Public Speaking

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

- A good speech is **well-structured and signposted** to enhance clarity and memorability. 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.

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.

General Speech Purposes

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 Alaska is doing a good job (or a bad job) is an attempt to influence an attitude or opinion. With speeches 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 an 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



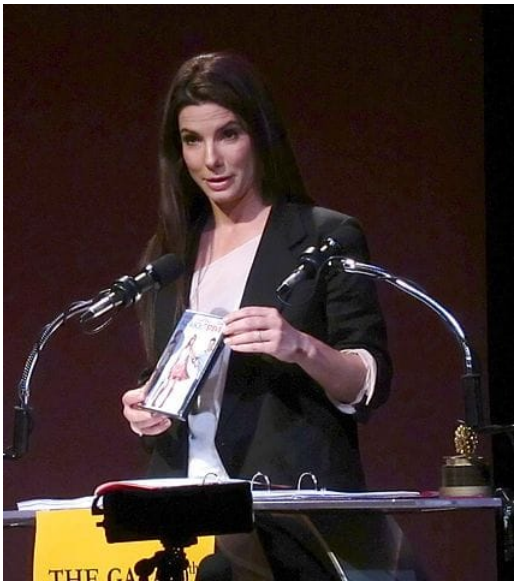




Figure 12.3.6: Image 6 Figure 12.3.7: Image 7 Figure 12.3.8: Image 8

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.

Some common special occasion 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.

The success of any speech depends on the speaker's willingness to take responsibility for the event and strategically plan for their audience's needs. Whether you are delivering a technical report, advocating for a change in belief, or offering a heartfelt toast, the core principles remain the same: maintain a clear purpose, foster a sense of immediacy, and present information with honesty and clarity. By mastering these different speech types and focusing on connection rather than just content, you can ensure your message is not only heard but truly impactful.

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12.4: Chapter 12 Summary

Public Speaking Review

The Nature and Value of Public Speaking

- Definition: The act of one person speaking to many. It is a formal presentation bound by specific strategies and techniques.
- Responsibility: Unlike interpersonal or small group communication, the speaker bears the primary responsibility for the success of the interaction. Feedback is subtle (facial expressions, fidgeting).
- Societal Function: It is the foundation of self-governance in a democracy, allowing for the peaceful resolution of differences and the dissemination of information.
- Personal Benefits:
  - Managing Anxiety: Building self-confidence by confronting the fear of being judged.
  - Self-Presentation: Learning to manage nonverbal cues to appear competent and professional.
  - Packaging Information: Learning to be "receiver-oriented" to benefit the audience.

A Brief History of Rhetoric

- Ancient Greece: Public speaking emerged as a vital skill in 621 B.C. when Athenian laws were codified, moving power from nobility to the courts and assemblies.
- Aristotle: The "founder of rhetoric." He defined rhetoric as "all available means of persuasion" and wrote the first textbook, *The Rhetoric*.
- The Romans:
  - Cicero: Argued for a balance of substance and style; the "perfect orator" is a philosopher-statesman.
  - Quintilian: Defined rhetoric as "the good man speaking well." He organized the Five Canons of Rhetoric:
    1. Invention: Compiling content.
    2. Disposition: Arranging content effectively.
    3. Style: Wording the presentation.
    4. Memorization: Knowing the content thoroughly.
    5. Delivery: The physical presentation.
- Middle Ages: Rhetoric was often condemned as a "pagan art" due to the rise of Christianity.
- Renaissance: A struggle between Humanists (language reveals the human experience) and Rationalists (truth is found only through scientific inquiry).
- 1600–1800:
  - Epistemological Tradition: Study of how language and psychology drive persuasion.
  - Belles Lettres Movement: Focused on the aesthetic and "beautiful" qualities of writing.
  - Elocutionary Movement: Focused strictly on delivery (gestures and vocals), eventually becoming formulaic and perceived as "fake."
- The Gilded Age: Prized long, ornate, boisterous speeches delivered without microphones.

Aristotelian Modes of Proof

- Ethos: Persuasion based on the speaker's character. Crucial: Credibility is granted by the audience based on their perception of the speaker at that moment.
- Pathos: Engaging the audience's emotions. Persuasion occurs when a speaker offers a way for the audience to align their actions with their beliefs to achieve emotional comfort.
- Logos: Using argument, logical reasoning, and credible evidence to persuade.

Modern Influences on Style

- Radio: Introduced a more intimate, conversational style (e.g., FDR's "Fireside Chats").
- Television: Shifted focus to visual elements and public image (e.g., the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate).

- The Internet:
  - Fact-Checking: Speakers are held accountable via sites like Snopes or Politifact.
  - Echo Chambers: Partisan news sites can create barriers; speakers must choose sources the audience deems credible.
  - The "Twitter Effect": A shift toward shorter, direct presentations due to decreased patience for long discourse.

Defining a "Good" Speech

- Organized Conversation: Sounds natural and comfortable but follows a clear structure with obvious transitions.
- Purpose-Driven: The speaker has a clear goal (inform, persuade, etc.) and does not wander or mislead.
- Active Choices: The speaker is strategic, making decisions to increase the likelihood of success.
- Immediacy: Building a "bridge" between the speaker and the audience to create a sense of connection.

General Speech Purposes

1. To Inform: Objective and non-directive.
   - *Report:* Summarizing a body of information.
   - *Demonstration:* Step-by-step "how-to."
   - *Explanation:* Drawing from multiple sources to enlighten on a topic.
2. To Persuade: Subjective and highly directive.
   - *Beliefs:* Influencing what the audience holds to be true/false.
   - *Attitudes:* Influencing the audience's opinion (good vs. bad).
   - *Actuation:* Moving the audience to a specific action.
3. To Entertain: Primary focus is generating laughter (e.g., after-dinner speeches).
4. Special Occasion: Designed to fit specific events (Eulogies, Toasts, Introductions, Award presentations, Commencements).

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13: PREPARING A SPEECH

13.1: Audience Analysis
13.2: The Topic and Thesis

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13.1: Audience Analysis

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.

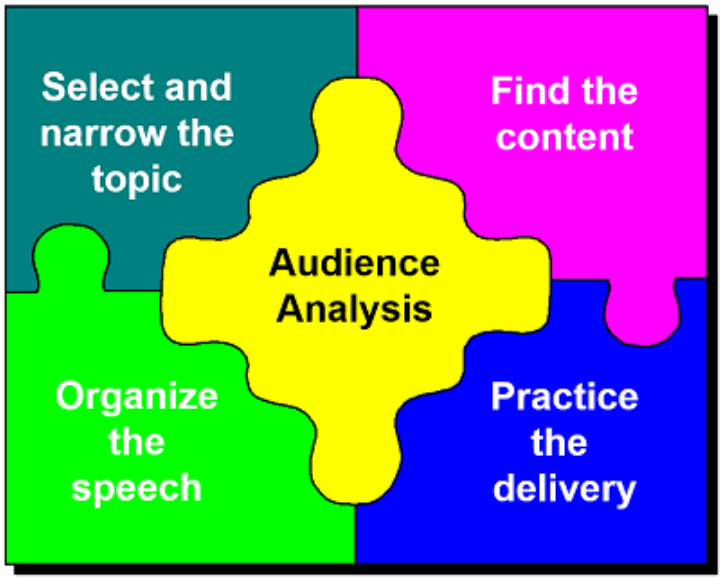


Figure 13.1.1: Image 1

Gathering Info

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:

- Gender Distribution
- Education Level
- Probable Income Level
- Relationship Status
- Parental Status



Figure 13.1.2: Image 2



Figure 13.1.3: Image 3

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 Alaska, 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? Knowing the basis of why they are there gives the speaker a sense of what the audience is expecting and the attitudes they are likey holding. For a truly voluntary audience, the speaker has an audience anxious to hear what they say and will generally be quite attentive to the message. For a mandated audience, the speaker is facing an audience that may resent being present and assumes the presentation will be boring or irrelevant. For such an audience, the speaker will need to focus on gaining interest and building relevance. For the blended audience, the speaker can generally assume a degree of interest if the information is presented in an interesting manner.



Figure 13.1.4: Image 4

Other inferences can be made as well. For example, given a traditional college classroom of thirty 18- 20-year-old students, the following inferences generally hold true:

- Their personal income is likely low.
- They are probably not parents yet.
- While some may be in longer-term relationships, most are probably not married nor engaged.
- They are interested in completing their education and establishing themselves in a moderately well-paying career.
- They may trend more liberal than conservative.
- They tend to feel passionate about certain issues.
- While they are likely aware of current events generally, they are not typically aware of specific details.
- Socializing is an important activity.
- They may not be very politically active.

Although we know these do not apply to each individual audience member, we are aiming to identify what we think is generally true about the audience overall. By making these inferences, we start to understand what is important to the audience. We have a sense of their values, interests, needs, and expectations, which can serve as a target, helping us aim the speaker's message more precisely. We use this information in the final stage of audience analysis: adapting the speech.

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 Speaking

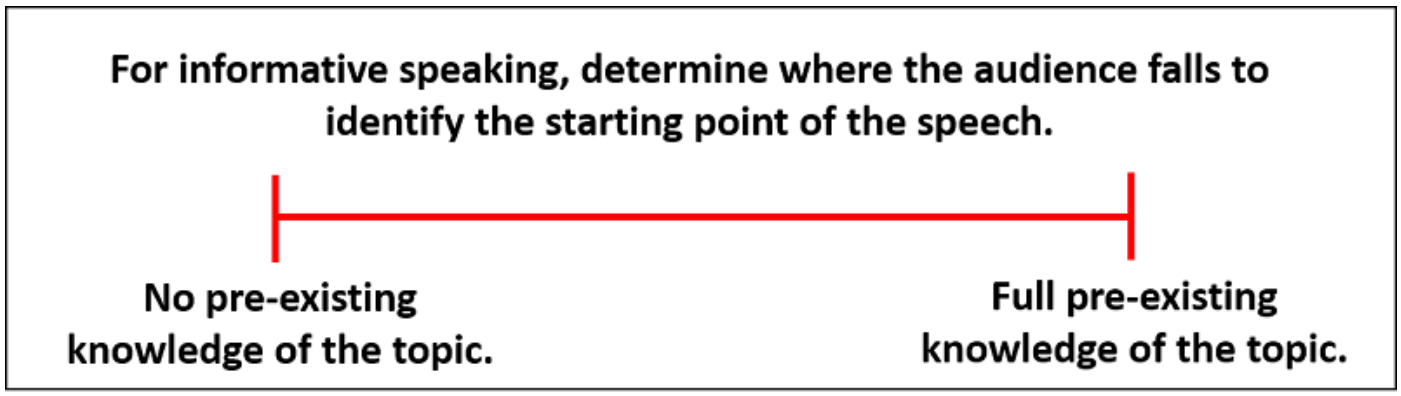


Figure 13.1.5: Image 5

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 the 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 audience's 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 audience's 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 Speaking

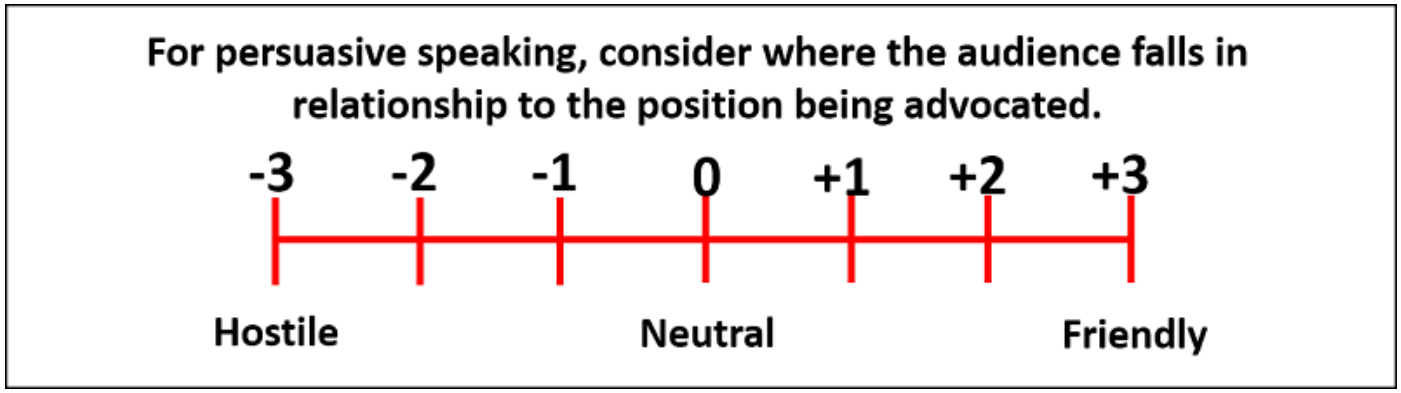


Figure 13.1.6: Image 6

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.

Consider the Venue

The **venue** of the speech is *the space in which the speech will be given*. Each venue will place its own limitations and demands on how the speech will be given. Just as we need to adapt the content of the speech to the audience, we also need to make appropriate plans for the location. The possible factors affecting the speech vary widely, but some common ones include the size of the space, the availability of technology, and arrangement.



Figure 13.1.7: Image 7

First, one thing the size of the space will determine is the need for a sound system. If the speaker is to use a microphone, will it be affixed to a lecturn? Will it be handheld? Will it be a body microphone worn like a headset? Is it wireless or wired? The answer to any of these questions impacts how the speech will be given. For instance, if the microphone is attached to the lecturn, the speaker must remain fixed in one location and must be sure to always keep the microphone in front of their mouth. If the microphone is handheld, the speaker will have one hand occupied at all times, so gesturing needs to be adapted.

Second, visual aid capabilities should be considered. If planning to use slideware, is there a projector and screen? How will the speaker get the slides to display: connect their own computer or use one provided by the location? How will they control the slides: a remote? Is the room organized so all audience members will be able to see the screen comfortably?

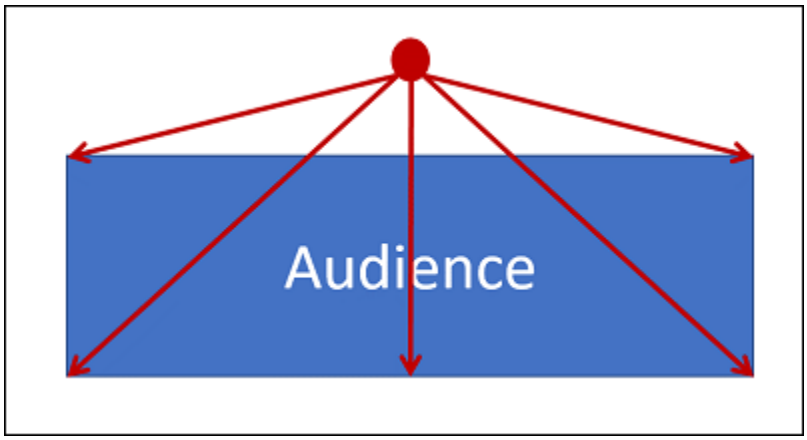


Figure 13.1.8: Image 8

Third, the arrangement of the room may impact how the speaker engages the entire audience. For a flat, wide room, as in Image 8, the speaker will need to focus on scanning far left and far right to take in the entire audience. If possible, the speaker should move across the room to give each area of the audience priority focus for a time. If using a projected visual aid, audience members on the far edges may find it difficult to see, so the speaker will need to focus on making sure all understand what is being show.

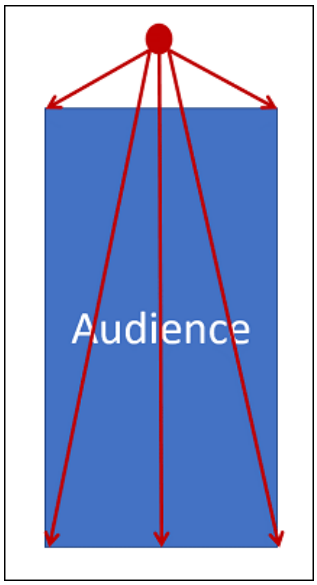


Figure 13.1.9: Image 9

For a narrow, deep room, Image 9, the speaker will need to adjust volume and work to make sure the message, both spoken and visual, can reach the back row. Visual aids, and ideally the speaker, need to be elevated high enough for all to see.

Mastering the art of public speaking requires viewing the audience not as a passive group of listeners, but as the essential piece that completes the puzzle. By diligently gathering demographic data, drawing insightful inferences about their values, and adapting every element—from your language and sources to your physical presence in the venue—you transform a generic presentation into a targeted, impactful experience.

Whether you are informing a neutral crowd, persuading a hostile one, or navigating the technical constraints of a specific room, success is found in the bridge you build between your message and their reality. When you prioritize the audience, you don't just deliver a speech; you create a connection that ensures your message is not only heard but truly understood.

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13.2: The Topic and Thesis

Finding the right topic is often the most daunting hurdle for any public speaker, particularly in a classroom setting where the subject isn't always pre-determined by professional expertise. While it is tempting to simply talk about what we love, effective communication requires a shift from a "sender-based" to a "receiver-based" approach. This section outlines the essential criteria for selecting a topic—balancing audience interest, speaker passion, occasion appropriateness, and strict time limits. By understanding how to narrow a broad subject into a focused speech purpose and a concise thesis statement, speakers can ensure their message is both manageable and impactful for their specific audience.

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 13.2.3: Figure 3

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.

As we know from looking at culture, Americans are quite monochronic. We see time as a resource, like money, to be budgeted and spent wisely. When speeches end on time, we have gotten what we have paid for. If they run a little short, we may feel we got a deal, but if they run quite short, we feel we got cheated. The audience is spending their time on the speaker; give them their money's worth. On the other end, if the speech runs overtime, the speaker is "stealing" time from the audience, taking our time resource without our permission. Time limits are very important in a monochronic culture.

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.

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 purpose of the speech establishes its parameters. 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.

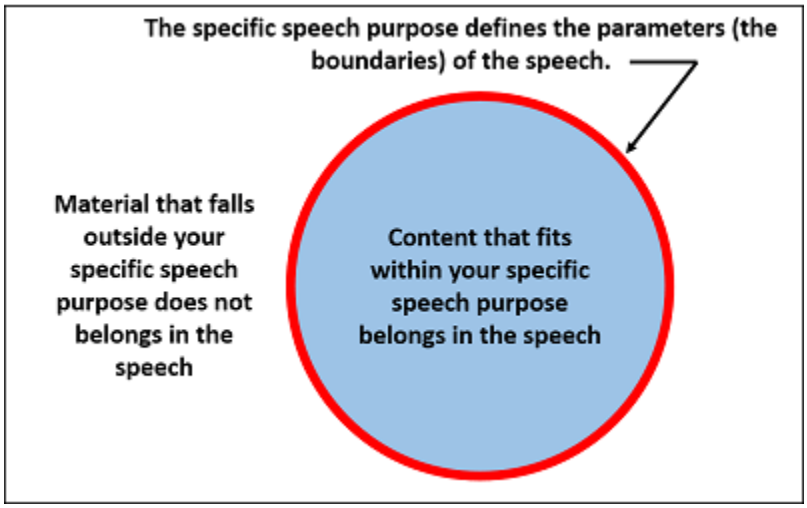


Figure 13.2.4: Figure 4

For example:

- After listening to my speech, the audience will know 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 about creative ways to use 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 see the value in donating 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 know 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 alternative forms of financial aid for you to consider.

- "After listening to my speech, the audience will be informed of creative ways to use macaroni and cheese."

  becomes

  "I'll show you several creative ways to use 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.

Ultimately, the success of a presentation begins long before the speaker takes the stage; it starts with the deliberate process of topic development. By moving from a general idea to a specific, narrowed topic, you respect both your audience's time and the occasion's requirements. A well-crafted speech purpose and a clear, "blatant" thesis act as the guardrails for your content, keeping the presentation on track and preventing it from expanding beyond its intended scope. Mastering these foundational steps transforms the challenge of "finding something to say" into the opportunity to deliver a purposeful, professional, and highly focused message.

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14: ORGANIZING A SPEECH

14.1: Parts of a Speech
14.2: The Body
14.3: Introductions and Conclusions

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14.1: Parts of a Speech

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.

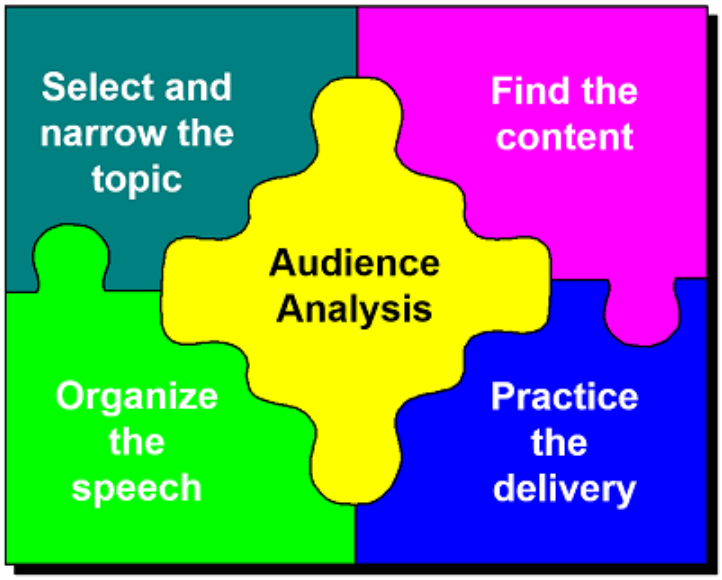


Figure 14.1.1: Figure 1

Parts of the Speech

While there are a variety of ways to organize a speech, the most common structure breaks the speech into four parts:

- Introduction
- Thesis/preview
- Body of the speech
- Conclusion

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.

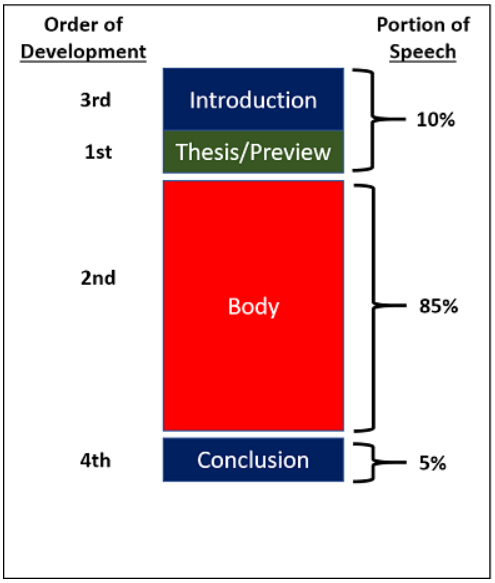


Figure 14.1.2: Figure 2

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 changes in one part of speech may have a ripple effect on other parts. In the end, a good speaker makes sure that the speech is consistent, coherent, organized, and flows well for the audience.

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14.2: The Body

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.

Coordination and Subordination

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.

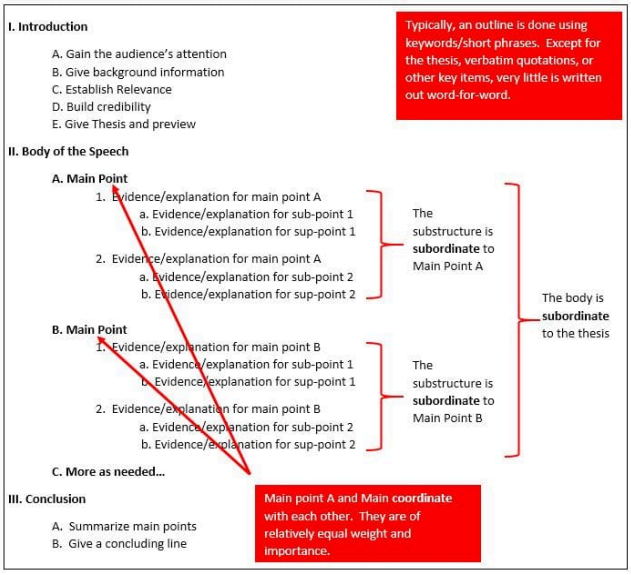


Figure 14.2.1: Figure 1

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 subsistence fishing opportunities in Alaska, dividing the state into the Kenai Peninsula, interior, Aleutians, Kodiak, Western Alaska, etc. 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, and enhances memory 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 Chapter 15.

Incorporating 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 transition*s, 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:

- **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,"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.

- **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.
- **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:

  "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.
- **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.

Constructing the body of a speech—which comprises roughly 85 percent of the total presentation—requires a deliberate focus on structure and flow. By organizing a manageable number of coordinate main points into a logical development pathway, speakers transform complex information into a memorable experience for their listeners. Whether utilizing a chronological, topical, or problem-solution format, the key to success lies in the "substructure" of evidence and the strategic use of transitions. By employing overt signposts and summary-preview transitions, a speaker ensures the audience remains on track, ultimately fulfilling the thesis's promise and delivering a clear, impactful message.

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14.3: Introductions and Conclusions

While the body of a speech contains the core of your message, the way you begin and end your presentation often determines its ultimate success. A well-crafted introduction does more than just start the clock; it captures attention, establishes your credibility, and sets the emotional tone for everything that follows. A compelling conclusion reminds your audience of your main points and offers a lasting impression. By understanding the strategic purposes of these "bookends," speakers can ensure their message is not only heard but truly received.

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 introduction gets them to want to listen. How well a speaker starts and ends a speech will significantly affect how the audience attends to and remembers the message.

The Primacy-Recency Effect

A phenomenon called the **primacy-recency effect** is *a theory that argues 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 Thesis

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.



Figure 14.3.1: Figure 1

A concept that comes into play with speaker credibility is **grace**. In religion , grace refers to a forgiveness of sins. In public speaking, grace refers to *the audience's ability to overlook minor mistakes the speaker makes*. Again, due to how we know perception works, if a speaker begins a speech in a strong, confident manner, the audience assumes the speech will be strong and minor errors get overlooked. However, if the speaker starts weakly, giving the impression they are not prepared, the audience

expects a poor speech and will look for evidence fulfilling the expectation. Each mistake, even minor, is noticed as it proves the audience's expectations were correct. Speakers want to start off establishing positive expectations to receive grace from the audience.

5. To Give the Thesis/Preview

At the end 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, but 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.



Figure 14.3.2: Figure 2

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 14.3.3: Figure 3

Conclusions

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.



Figure 14.3.4: Figure 4

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.”

While the introduction opens the door and builds a connection, the conclusion provides the necessary closure and summary to ensure the audience walks away with a clear understanding of your thesis. By utilizing powerful closing techniques—such as a call to action, a compelling challenge, or a thoughtful reference back to the introduction—you provide a sense of finality that reinforces your message. Mastering these critical components ensures that your presentation starts with impact and ends with a resonance that lingers long after you leave the stage.

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15: SUPPORTING A SPEECH

15.1: Researching and Using Evidence
15.2: Visual Aids

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15.1: Researching and Using Evidence

In an era where information is abundant but often scrutinized or dismissed as "fake news," the ability to bolster one's claims with credible evidence is more than just a skill—it is an ethical necessity. Ranging from personal experiences to external data, support materials serve as the foundation of credibility, allowing a speaker to transfer the authority of established sources to their own words. This section explores the various forms of evidence—testimony, examples, and statistics—and provides a framework for evaluating and citing these sources to ensure your message is both persuasive and trustworthy.

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 critial process to insure we are presenting evidence to our audience that can withstand scrutiny. To that end, later in this section, we present the CRAAP test for evaluating sources.

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.

Evidence

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. 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 "9/11" would remind the audience of the attacks on the World Trade Centers. 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 a few years ago.

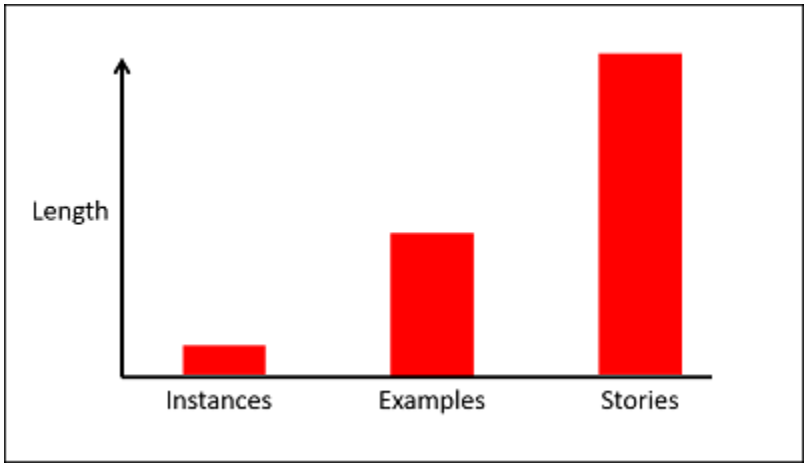


Figure 15.1.1: Figure 1

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

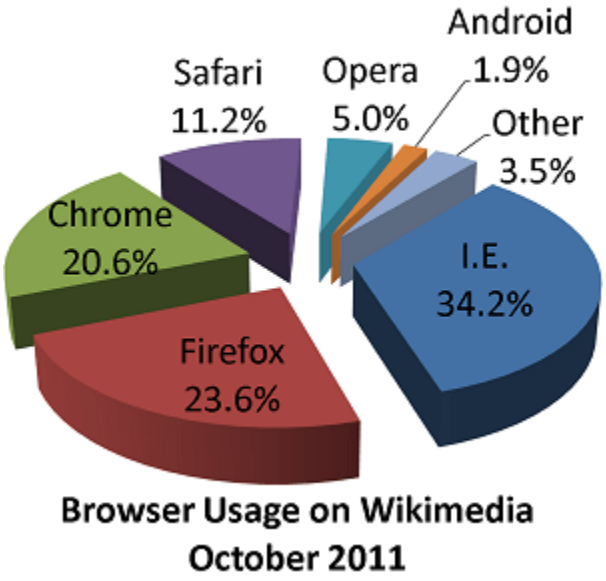
been quantified and expressed in statistics, the statistics are inherently truthful. Statistics can be manipulated, misused, and misrepresented just as any other evidence can be misused. Speakers must be especially cautious when selecting statistics to be sure the numbers come from a quality source and are accurate reflections of reality.

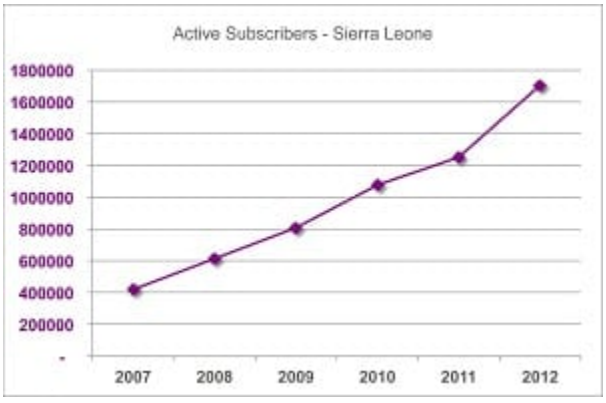
Statistics are used in two ways: descriptively and inferentially. **Descriptive statistics** *describe what was true at a given moment in time*. They describe data from the past. The past can be distant, such as in years, or recent, such as hours or days. The statistics reflect what was found when the 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.





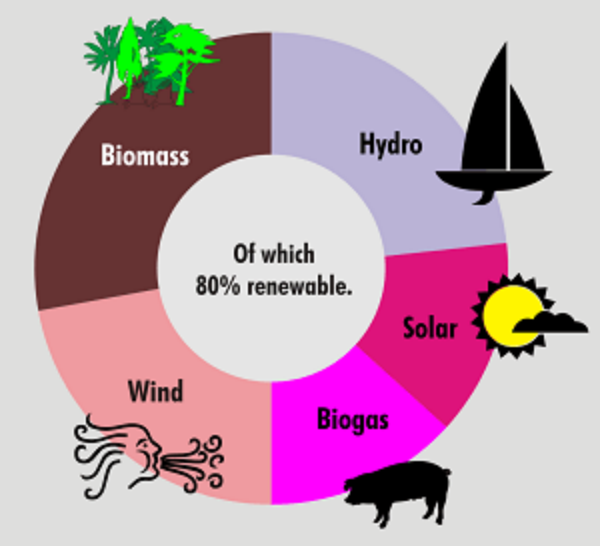


Figure 15.1.2: Figure 2 Figure 15.1.3: Figure 3 Figure 15.1.4: Figure 4

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.

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.

The strength of a speech lies not just in the eloquence of the speaker, but in the quality of the evidence they provide. By thoughtfully integrating testimony, vivid examples, and accurate statistics, a speaker can move an audience on both a rational and emotional level. However, the power of these tools comes with the responsibility to evaluate them rigorously using the CRAAP test—checking for currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose—and to cite them transparently during the presentation. When support materials are chosen with care and cited with clarity, they do more than just prove a point; they build a bridge of trust between the speaker and the audience, ensuring that the message is not only heard but believed.

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15.2: Visual Aids

Quite commonly, we employ visual aids to assist us in presenting the message in a clear, easily followed manner. Although they are 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 slideware, 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 slideware to poster board to objects, the speaker has many options for creating powerful visual elements.

Slideware

Visual aids have undergone a massive transformation since the introduction of Microsoft's PowerPoint in 1990. Today, in addition to PowerPoint, there are other options, such as Apple's Keynote or the online tool Prezi. Traditional forms of visual aids, such as posters, overheads, and slides, have been replaced by **slideware** . While the use of some non-slideware visual aids is still appropriate, the reality is that audiences have become accustomed to seeing slideware accompanying presentations.

While these software options are excellent tools for creating professional, intriguing, and informative visual aids, many of us have experienced horrible slideware presentations in which the speaker talked to the screen, read from the screen, or failed to coordinate what they were saying with what the audience was viewing. By now, students have had enough experience viewing these presentations that most should have a good idea of what *not* to do.

When creating slideware presentations, each slide should be purposeful and thoughtfully created. Each word, bullet point, or image should be on the slide for a distinct reason, not simply as decoration. Good slideware is created with a clear goal in mind.

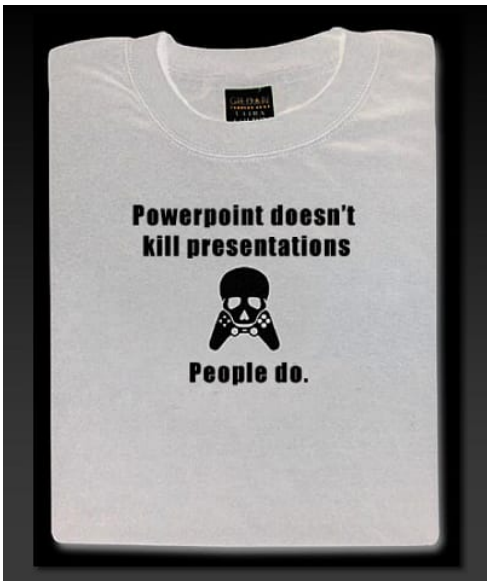


Figure 15.2.1: Figure 1

When creating slides:

- Use a consistent theme from slide to slide, keeping colors and fonts the same throughout.
- Use no less than an 18-size font, but do not make them so large they appear to be “yelling” at the audience.
- Avoid the tendency to put too much on the screen. Use key words or phrases, leaving *the speaker* to fill in the details.
- Use the transition tools to reveal points one at a time. Whenever a visual aid appears, regardless of what it is, the audience will immediately attempt to decode the whole thing. The speaker should reveal only what they want the audience to focus on at that moment.
- Use only significant images. A significant image is one that is selected to make a specific point, and one the speaker will deliberately draw to the audience’s attention. Images should not be used for background or decoration. Since the audience will look at everything on the screen, the images can be too distracting.
- Do not fill slides to the edge. Leave space to stand slightly overlapping the screen to keep the speaker and the slide as one visual element.
- Do not overload the slide. Find a nice balance between too sparse and too crowded.
- Use black slides or blank slides for when there is nothing to show the audience. Plan them right into the presentation. If using a remote with a blackout option, plan when to use the feature in place of blank/black slides.
- Consider carefully the opening slide. Most people assume a title slide is needed, but many times they are unnecessary distractions. For most speeches, simply start with a black slide and only reveal the content slides as they become relevant to the speech content.
- Do not use any more slides or visual information than necessary, but use what is needed. Be thoughtful in deciding what is needed to aid your audience in understanding the point, but at the same time do not use too much so it distracts from the speaker and the message.
- Always be prepared for the presentation to not work. Technology is prone to failure, so being able to give the presentation without the slideware is an important skill. A common situation in professional settings is to provide the audience a printout of the slides, so while not ideal, in the event of technology failure, the speaker can guide the audience through the printed version of the slideware.

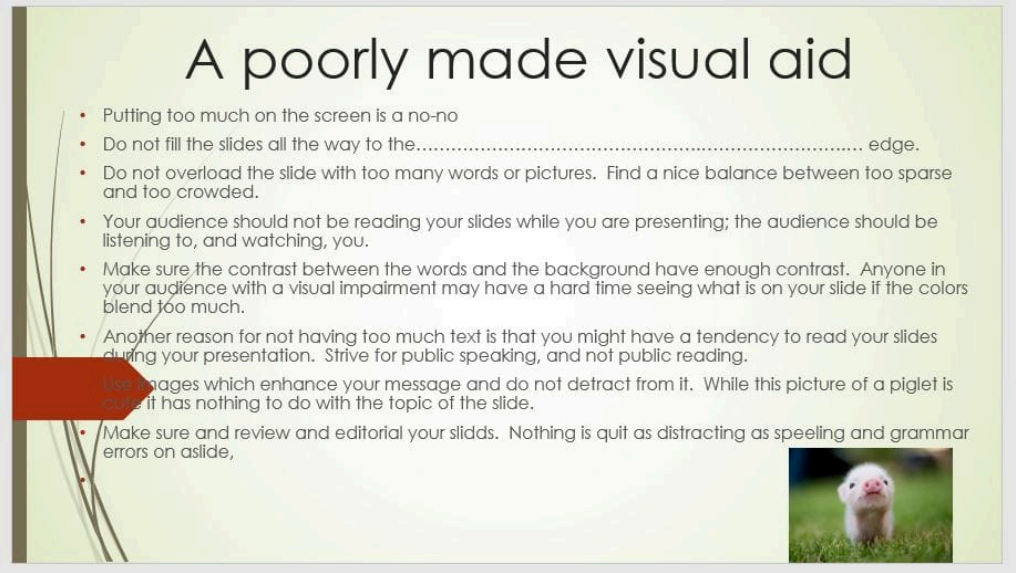


Figure 15.2.2: Figure 2



Figure 15.2.3: Figure 3

One final caution: slideware can hijack development time away. These are very powerful tools allowing the speaker to create detailed animations, special effects, and a plethora of visually energetic and stimulating imagery. The vast majority of these are unnecessary in public speaking, and the speaker can easily find themselves spending hours on an effect that ends up having little value. Instead, work for a minimal, concise, neat slideware presentation, and then put time into practicing with it to create a smooth, unified speech.

Speaking with Slideware

Many of us have seen very poor slideware presentations. One of the reasons audiences may dread PowerPoint is how poorly the speaker uses it. It is a tool, and needs to be handled carefully and appropriately. Using it effectively can enhance the message, but using it poorly can make the speech a trying time for the audience.

- First and foremost, **do not read from the slides**. This is one of the most common complaints regarding speakers using slideware. Most of us read fine, and to have the speaker read the slide to us is insulting. While the slide helps us focus on

what is being emphasized at that moment, it does not convey the core message; that is the speaker's job.

- A second major mistake some speakers make is speaking to the screen. While it is good to glance at the screen to make sure the correct slide is being projected and to draw the audience's attention to a specific item, the **speaker's focus must remain on the audience**. Always remember, every time the speaker glances at the screen, the audience follows even if there is nothing substantial to look at.
- **Control focus.** For the audience to take in both the speaker and the screen, if possible stand next to the screen, creating a unified visual picture. If the speaker wants the audience's full attention, they should take a step or two away from the screen while displaying a black or blank slide. Do not stand in front of the screen, in the light, or in a manner which blocks the audience's view.

  As mentioned above, use the transitions tools in the slideware to control when specific items appear and disappear, but also use gestures to control focus by pointing out specific items on the screen. For instance, if Kathryn is describing how horses are judged at a county fair and has an image of a horse on the screen, she should point to the various parts of the horse as she describes them. It is Kathryn's job to guide the audience's focus to the key part of the image.
- **Use a remote,** if possible. A presentation remote gives enormous freedom to move, gesture, and otherwise vary the visual image being presented to the audience. Prior to speaking, it is crucial the speaker is comfortable with how the remote works and can use it quickly and confidently. It is important to know what buttons to use, and, equally important, which ones to avoid (and how to recover if a button gets hit). How well the speaker uses the remote and interacts with the slideware influences credibility, so being proficient is important.
- **Test prior to speaking.** Make very sure the technology works before starting the presentation. Just because something worked at home on a personal laptop does not mean it will work in the presentation venue. Some technical issues to consider:
  - Is the speaker expected to provide the laptop? Or will it be sufficient to bring the presentation file to be used on the host's equipment?
  - Is the host system compatible with the specific slideware program used?
  - Is there a presentation remote?
  - Is sound required? If so, make sure to test before the presentation.
  - Is internet access required? If so, is there a password required or other obstacles to getting online? Is the link fast enough for what you need?
  - How does the projector work? If connecting to a personal laptop, who provides the cables?
  - How far away is the nearest electrical outlet? Is an extension cord needed? Who will provide one?

The best assumption about using technology is something will likely go wrong, so the norm should be to arrive early, set up, and test thoroughly. Failing to have the technology ready and working is ultimately the responsibility of the speaker. Problems may be seen as the speaker being unprepared, hurting their credibility.

Corporate comedian, Don McMillan, identifies some of the pitfalls of PowerPoint:

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

Video 15.2.3: Video 1 **youtu.be/MjcO2ExtHso**

Prior to the advent of slideware, visual aids were typically created on poster board then placed on an easel for the audience to view. While not common anymore, such a method is still acceptable, especially for a smaller audience for which a screen and projector may be overwhelming, or for when the technology is not available.

Poster board can be used to display graphs, charts, drawings, photographs, or any other such items. The rules of audience focus apply just as with slideware: reveal the visual aid when the audience should focus on it, and remove it when the audience should focus on the speaker.

Note that the speaker will need something on which to display the visual aid. Typically, a visual aid stand, such as that pictured in

Image 4, is used. The speaker needs to make sure they either have one or the venue will provide one.



Figure 15.2.4: Figure 4

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. As with any visual aid, there are some guidelines for use:

- Make sure the other person is trustworthy. At times, people will volunteer to have a chance to be in the spotlight and may be somewhat difficult to control. The ideal person knows the speaker is in control and will respect their role as an aid to the speaker.
- Make sure the person is comfortable with what they will be doing. If volunteering for the Heimlich Maneuver, a person who is ticklish may have difficulty maintaining their composure during the demonstration. If they will be engaging in a physical activity, be sure they can safely and comfortably do so.
- Make sure it is very clear what they are to do. Ideally, the speaker and the person should work together beforehand to plan what will happen and when. If calling for a volunteer, make sure instructions are clear and distinct. Avoid vague, indefinite directions. Be prepared to demonstrate what is needed.

- Treat the person with respect. It can be tempting to go for a cheap laugh at the volunteer's expense, but such behavior is boorish at best. All audience members should be treated respectfully and not embarrassed by their involvement with the presentation. Thank the individual when finished, giving them due credit for helping out.

Electronic Equipment

In addition to slideware, 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 slideware, 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.



Visual aids are meant to aid the speaker, not replace them. While tools like PowerPoint and physical models offer unique ways to clarify and enhance a message, they require a prepared speaker to guide the audience's focus. By keeping aids simple, practicing their delivery, and always being ready to present without them, you maintain your credibility and ensure that your message remains the star of the show.

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16.1: Delivery Methods

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 weak. 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, well learned 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. If a speech is boring, it is because the speaker chose to make it that way. 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

Four methods for giving speeches are:

Impromptu

I**mpromptu 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 disfluencies, 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*. 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.



Figure 16.1.1: Figure 1

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 a notecard, if one is going to be used. 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 notecard. Practice the speech from the notecard, making any necessary alterations. Once the final card is developed, focus the remainder of the practice on developing a strong delivery. Be sure to practice being able to glance at the notecard, don't read from it.
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 16.1.2: 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.

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16.2: Delivery Factors

Verbal Delivery Factors

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.

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 Factors

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 16.2.3: 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.

Disfluencies

Disfluencies 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 disfluencies 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 notecard, 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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16.3: Managing Speaking Anxiety

Speech Anxiety

Glossophobia

Glossophobia is *the irrational fear of public speaking, far beyond normal speech anxiety*. A glossophobic person would most likely avoid a speech class completely. Anyone who has ever experienced an intense, phobic reaction to something like heights, water, snakes, or spiders, knows the anxiety is irrational and highly magnified beyond what the situation warrants. A person with this degree of public speaking fear needs to be assisted by a mental health professional.

To be able to deliver an effective presentation, speakers must understand, appreciate, and cope with speech anxiety. Speech anxiety is a perfectly normal, natural and healthy reaction to a speaking situation. Everyone who is healthy and understands the dynamics of the speaking situation will experience some degree of speech anxiety. The difference between novice and experienced speakers is experienced speakers do not fear their anxiety and they know how to work with it instead of working against it. Speech anxiety does not go away; it can fade and become a secondary issue, but it is always there, at least for mentally healthy speakers. We do not address "getting rid" of anxiety; rather, we address understanding and coping with it, not fighting it.

Causes

The causes of speech anxiety are numerous, and how they affect a given person will vary. However, some common ones include:

Lack of Experience

As predictability drops and uncertainty rises, anxiety tends to also rise. It is normal that we tend to fear those things we do not feel we can predict and anticipate. Freshman may feel a lot of anxiety about going to college simply because the experience is new, but once settled in on campus and into a routine, the anxiety fades. Speaking is the same way; once a person has given several speeches, they learn what to expect from themselves and their audiences. They now have a much higher level of predictability, leading to a higher level of comfort and a lower level of anxiety.



Figure 16.3.4: Figure 4

Lack of Preparation

Another major, and controllable, cause of speech anxiety is the lack of preparation. If we feel we are unprepared for any situation, our anxiety will increase. Imagine walking into a class totally unprepared for a test; chances are test anxiety will rise. However, if walking into the room adequately prepared for the speech, confidence will increase and anxiety will drop. For this to work, speakers need to prove to themselves they are prepared, not to anyone else.

Fear of Rejection

Most of us do not like rejection, and being placed in situations in which we risk rejection can be nerve wracking. The reality is speakers are being judged and evaluated by the listener. Accept this reality and have confidence in the message and the delivery. No speaker will ever be fully accepted by every listener, but if they can bring self-confidence and preparation to the speaking situation, the vast majority of audiences will be polite and respectful.

False Expectations

Because of lack of experience, novice speakers are especially susceptible to false expectations. Novice speakers tend to have expectations that are either too grandiose or too negative. Either can be harmful. If a speaker has expectations set unrealistically high, the speaker has established unreachable standards, increasing his/her anxiety. On the other hand, if the expectations are too low, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy based on the assumption, "I will do poorly; thus, why bother practicing," which leads to failure.

Anxiety/Fear Cycle

As we become anxious about speaking, we fear the anxiety will make us fail. The fear of failure can increase our anxiety in a perpetuating cycle. The fear is a fear of the anxiety. We think being nervous is a sign of impending failure, so we become afraid of our anxiety. The more fear we have, the more anxiety we have. Anxiety cannot make a person fail; however, fear can make the person fail. Respect the normalcy of being anxious, but do not fear it.

Managing Anxiety

In coping with anxiety, it is important to remember three things:

1. **Having anxiety is a normal, physiological process**. As mentioned before, anxiety is a normal, common reaction to a stressful situation. When we perceive a situation as threatening in some way, our “fight, flight, or flee” reaction kicks in, fueled by a dump of the hormone, noradrenaline, into our system. This prepares our bodies to confront the threat. With the energy boost, our muscles tremble in anticipation of action, so we get shaky knees, hands, and voices. We find it challenging to control these tremors as the effect of the hormone overrides conscious control. Since, however, this reaction is triggered by how we perceive a situation, a way to manage anxiety is to alter how we think of the situation. Some suggestions are given below.
2. **Each person handles anxiety in their own way.** There is no single way to manage anxiety that will work for everyone. For some, prior to the event, eating small meals, avoiding caffeinated products, and engaging in positive visualization can work well. For others, a large meal of “comfort food” can be relaxing. Some use mental tricks to view the situation as less threatening, and others use relaxing music to calm themselves. With experience, speakers find the things having the most positive impact on their anxiety.
3. **The goal is to manage anxiety, not get rid of it.** Experience tells us the more novice speakers try to get rid of anxiety, the worse it actually becomes. If the goal is to get rid of anxiety, yet it occurs, the speaker may see themselves as failing. Since it is unrealistic to expect the anxiety to completely go away, a more practical, realistic goal is to learn to work with and manage it.

When managing anxiety, focus on three key areas: preparation, expectation, and practice.

Preparation: Preparation addresses two areas: preparing the speech and preparing the speaker. First, being confident in the amount and quality of preparation will help moderate anxiety. If the speaker believes they are adequately prepared and have done what is necessary to get ready, this can help moderate anxiety.

Some other suggestions include:

- Dress comfortably. While it is important to dress appropriately for the occasion, be sure to wear comfortable clothes that enhance confidence. Since the anxiety tends to make speakers feel warm, wear "cooler" clothes to avoid overheating. Wear comfortable shoes.

- Avoid too much caffeine. Since the noradrenaline is already providing additional energy, adding caffeine may create a very uncomfortable, shaky situation.
- Even though anxiety can cause stomach upset, it is better to eat something than to leave the stomach empty. Bland food, such as toast or a bagel, can ward off nausea.
- Avoid drugs or alcohol. While it may seem tempting to use things to relax, drugs or alcohol can reduce the speaker's focus, mental acuity, and overall ability to manage the event. If an audience perceives the speaker as intoxicated or under the influence, the speaker's credibility may be ruined. The chances of doing or saying something embarrassing run high, so it is best to not use alcohol. Of course, if a physician has prescribed medications for anxiety, follow the doctor's directions.
- Avoid inflating the anxiety. A scene far too common in a public speaking class is students, already anxious for the speech, inflating their anxiety. Sharing how they feel, how nervous they are, and engaging in a lot of anxious movement tends to magnify anxiety. Sitting quietly, breathing deeply, and visualizing a successful speech are far more beneficial.

Expectations: Carefully think through what is likely to happen during the speaking event to have reasonable expectations. Avoid the extremely positive or negative expectations and anticipate the event as realistically as possible.

Most audiences will be quiet, attentive, and respectful. While we see hecklers yelling at politicians, the vast majority of speeches are given to audiences who listen attentively and respond politely and appropriately. If attempting humor, a smile or a chuckle are excellent signs of success. Rarely will a speaker have the audience responding with raucous laughter. Even if the audience contains a few non-attentive members, focus on the ones attending to the speech; give them what they came there for.

As a speaker, the chances of really "bombing" are very low, assuming adequate preparation and practice. Speakers using an extemporaneous, conversational style will have a few disfluencies, may misstate a word, or have to check their notes to remind them of what to say. These minor slips are generally non-issues, as long as the speaker does not call attention to them. The audience determines how to respond to a speaker's mistakes based on the speaker's reaction. If the speaker simply moves past them or quickly corrects themselves, the audience will pay little attention to them. If the speaker appears flustered or distracted, the audience will begin to anticipate failure. The best thing a speaker can do is have realistic expectations of what will happen during the speech: not perfect and not horrible. Through some careful self-talk and practice, speakers will have a good, realistic sense of what the speaking experience will be like.

Practice: Finally, and perhaps most importantly, engage in active practice. Active practice means giving the speech as realistically as possible, not just thinking or mumbling through it. Speakers have a lot to do, and just as with any complex activity, practice is necessary to train themselves to do the best job. Through active practice, the speaker gets more comfortable with the physical process of standing, moving, gesturing, all while speaking a well-organized, coherent message. If visual aids are being used, they become comfortable with when to reveal and when to remove them, and with how to manage them the most effectively. The ideal situation, if possible, is to practice in the actual space in which the speech will be given. By using good, active practice, the speaker is reducing the unknowns, so there is less to be anxious about.

One caution about practicing: There is a tendency to practice the earlier parts of the speech over and over, yet the later parts receive very little attention. In practice, the speaker starts, makes an error, and starts over. After doing this several times, the introduction and early part of the body is getting a lot of attention; however, once a speaker gets through the entire speech, little effort is made to work all parts of the speech equally. While this stop/restart process is fine initially, at some point the speaker must practice the entire speech, beginning to end, several times. By doing this, the speaker is learning how to manage slips, making them less significant when they happen in the actual presentation.

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17: PUBLIC SPEAKING IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS

17.1: Speaking in Personal and Civic Contexts
17.2: Speaking in Academic Settings
17.3: Speaking in Business Settings
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17.1: Speaking in Personal and Civic Contexts

Learning Objectives

1. List three general guidelines for ceremonial speeches.
2. Identify strategies for effectively composing and delivering the following ceremonial speeches: speech of introduction, presenting an award, accepting an award, toast, speech of tribute, and eulogy.
3. Identify strategies for effectively composing and delivering a “This I Believe” speech.
4. Explain the connection between public advocacy and speaking.

Speaking in personal contexts includes elements of all three general purposes we learned earlier. You may inform an audience about an upcoming speaker during a speech of introduction or use humor to entertain during a toast. People are also compelled to speak about issues they care about, which may entail using persuasive strategies to advocate for a person, group, or issue.

Speaking on Special Occasions

Ceremonial speaking refers to speeches of praise, tribute, and celebration that bring audiences together on special occasions. Although most communication classes cover informative and persuasive speaking more than ceremonial speaking, I have had many students tell me after taking the class that the guidelines they learned for speaking on special occasions have been very useful for them. Before we get into specific examples of ceremonial speeches, we’ll discuss three general guidelines for ceremonial speeches: be prepared, be brief, and be occasion focused.

Speakers should always be prepared for a speech, but this can be challenging with special-occasion speaking because it is often unexpected. Even though most special occasions are planned, the speaking that goes on during these events isn’t always as planned. One reason for this lack of preparation is that people often, mistakenly, think they can “wing” a toast, introduction, or acceptance speech. Another reason is that special occasion speeches can “sneak up” on you if the person in charge of the event didn’t plan ahead for the speaking parts of the program and has to ask people to participate at the last minute. More than once, I have been asked to introduce a guest speaker at an event at the last minute. Given these reasons, it should be clear that even though ceremonial speeches are brief and don’t require the research of other speech types, they still require planning, good content, and good delivery.

Special-occasion speeches should always be brief, unless otherwise noted. With only a couple exceptions, these speeches are shorter than other speech types. Special occasions are planned events, and a speaker is just one part of a program. There may be a dinner planned, a special surprise coming up, other people to be honored, or even a limit on how long the group can use the facility. So delivering a long speech on such an occasion will likely create timing problems for the rest of the program.



Ceremonial speeches usually occur as part of a program, so brevity is important.

Defence Images – Prince Harry at the Invictus Games Opening Ceremony – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

A special-occasion speech should focus on the occasion. You will almost always be speaking about someone or something else like a group, organization, or event, so don't make the speech about you. Strategies for effective delivery still apply to special-occasion speeches. Since these occasions are often celebratory, it is important to be enthusiastic or reverent to the tone of the occasion. A toast may be lighthearted and jovial, a eulogy somber, a tribute stirring, or an acceptance speech celebratory. Even when accepting an award, speakers will spend most of their speech talking about others rather than them.

Speech of Introduction

Five minutes after I felt a tap on my shoulder, I was introducing the provost of the university. I didn't know before the tap that I was going to introduce him, and I didn't know that much about him. This is just one example of how special-occasion speeches can sneak up on you. Knowing this can help you "expect the unexpected." As we learned earlier, speaking anxiety increases when there is little time to prepare and practice a speech. Despite the lack of notice and my lack of knowledge about the person I would soon introduce, I drew on my knowledge of special-occasion speaking and made the most out of my five minutes of prep time.

A speech of introduction is a speech in which one speaker briefly introduces an upcoming speaker who is usually the focus of the occasion. Such speeches are usually only one to two minutes long. The first step in preparing a speech of introduction is to get to know the person you're introducing. If you've been asked to introduce someone, you are likely part of the team planning the event or you have a relationship with the person. If you already know the person and have a relationship with them, then this step is easily checked off the preparation list. If you've just been asked to introduce the guest because you are involved in the planning of the event, then you have hopefully been asked in advance and can take some time to get to know the person. You can find biographical information about many people online, through their professional or personal websites or social media profiles. The guest may have already sent a bio (a biographical sketch with information about their life and accomplishments) to put in the program. You want to make sure the information is up to date and valid, so it's good to verify any information found on the Internet or just contact the person directly to ask for a bio. While these are good places to start to get to know the person you will introduce, it's good to have some personal connection, too. You may want to communicate directly with the person and ask them a couple questions that you think the audience might find interesting but aren't included in the typical bio. Such direct communication might also allow you to make the introduction more personal, as you can note the lunch, phone call, or e-mail exchanges during your speech. In my situation, since I wasn't able to get to know the person, I had to rely on the information from the bio included in the program.

During the speech of introduction, make sure to say the person's name, correctly, several times. It so happened that the person I was introducing unexpectedly had a last name that was difficult for me to pronounce. So, after reviewing the bio and picking out highlights, I confirmed the pronunciation of his name with a couple people at the event who knew how to say it and then spent much of the remainder of my time saying the last name over and over. Mispronouncing someone's name is embarrassing for the

speaker and the audience.

You should also establish the speaker's credentials and credibility. Do not read the person's bio to the audience, especially if that bio is already included in the program. Remember, you are engaging in public speaking, not public reading. A bio that you pull from the Internet may also include information and accomplishments that aren't relevant to the occasion or the speaker's content. If you were introducing a speaker at a civic organization, it might be more relevant to focus on her community engagement and service rather than her academic accomplishments. Keep in mind the introduction sets up an audience's expectations for the speaker. You want to share his or her relevant credentials and your personal connection, if there is one, but make sure you don't "over sell" it, as in the following example: "Marko is one of the smartest and funniest people I have ever met. I have no doubts that he will both enlighten and entertain you with his presentation today!"

A speech of introduction also helps set the tone for the upcoming speaker and establish a relationship between the audience and speaker (Toastmasaters International, 2012). It is important that the tone you set matches with that of the upcoming speaker. Just as a heavy metal warm-up band wouldn't be a good setup for Celine Deon, a humorous and lighthearted introduction for a speaker with a serious topic would create an inconsistency in tone that could be uncomfortable for the speaker and the audience. By setting the tone, you help establish a relationship between the speaker and the audience. If you're unsure of the tone or content of the person's speech, you should contact that speaker or the event planner to find out. You also want to establish your own credibility and goodwill by being prepared in terms of content and delivery and expressing your thanks for being asked to introduce the speaker.



A welcome speaker introduces the audience to upcoming events.

EUScreen – Welcome Speech – CC BY-SA 2.0.

A speech of welcome is similar to a speech of introduction, but instead of introducing an audience to an upcoming speaker, you introduce the audience to upcoming events. If you are asked to deliver a speech of welcome, you're likely a representative of the group that planned or is hosting the event. Since a welcome speaker is usually the first speaker of the day and the proceeding sessions are timed, this is definitely an occasion where brevity will be appreciated. Getting behind schedule on the first presentation isn't a good way to start the day. Aside from graciously welcoming the audience, you should also provide key information about upcoming events and acknowledge key participants. In terms of previewing the events, do not read through a program or schedule if it's something that audience members already have in their possession. You can reference the program, but allow them to read it on their own. You may want to highlight a couple things on the program like a keynote speaker or awards ceremony. Definitely make sure to announce any changes in the schedule so people can plan accordingly. Thank any sponsors, especially if they are in attendance, and acknowledge any VIP guests.

Welcome speakers should also convey logistical information that audience members may need to know, which helps answer questions before the audience needs to ask them. Many people may not be familiar with a facility, so it may be necessary to inform them where the coffee and snacks are, where the restrooms are, or other simple logistics. Welcome speeches are often allotted more time than is needed, but do not feel obligated to fill that time. Audience members will not be upset if you finish

early, as they may have some last-minute things to do before the event gets started, and it doesn't hurt to get a little ahead of schedule, since things will inevitably get behind later on.

For the speeches previously discussed, just as with all speeches, it's important to know your audience. The nature of ceremonial speaking occasions helps facilitate audience and situational analysis. If you're asked to speak at such an occasion, you can usually get information from the event planner or coordinator, who should know the expectations for the tone and the general makeup of the audience.

Presenting an Award

If you have a leadership role in an organization, you may end up presenting an employee, a colleague, or a peer with an award. There are several steps in presenting an award, but the main goal of this speech is to enhance the value of the award and honor the person receiving it. As with other special-occasion speeches, it should be focused on the occasion and the particular award. Start by stating the name of the award and providing a brief overview of its purpose. Also share some information about the organization or group that is bestowing the award. Connect the values of the organization with the purpose of the award. You may also want to describe the selection process. If there were many qualified nominees and the decision was difficult to make, then stating that enhances the value of the award. Such statements also recognize others who were nominated but didn't win.

Once you've covered the background of the award and the selection process, you are usually at a good point to announce the winner, since the remaining information is specific to the person being honored with the award. Announce the winner and pause to allow the audience to acknowledge him or her before continuing on with the speech; however, don't bring the person up until you are ready to hand over the award, as it creates an awkward situation (WestsideToastmasters.com, 2012). Next, share the qualifications of the person receiving the award. This helps explain to the audience why the winner is deserving of the honor. Then connect the winner to the legacy of the award by saying how they are similar to previous winners. For example, "This year's winner joins a select group of other college seniors who have been recognized for their dedication to community service and outreach." You can also say what the person adds to the legacy of the award. For example, "Nick helped establish an alternative spring break program that will continue to service communities in need for many years to come." It can be an honor to present an award, but most of us would like to be on the other side of this speech.

Accepting an Award

Congratulations, you won an award! When you deliver a speech accepting an award, be brief, gracious, and humble. Before you begin speaking, take a moment, pause, smile, and make eye contact with the audience (Fripp, 2012). You may know ahead of time that you're going to win the award, or you may not. Either way, take time to write out an acceptance speech. Try to memorize most of the content to make the speech look genuine and spontaneous. If you have a lot of people to thank, you may write that information out on a small card to reference, just so you don't leave anyone out. Make sure to thank the group giving the award and the person who presented you with the award. Also compliment the other nominees, and thank those who helped make your accomplishment possible. In 2002, Halle Berry won an Academy Award for Best Leading Actress, making history as the first African American woman to earn that honor. The acceptance speech she delivered acknowledged the magnitude of the situation, keeping the focus on actresses who came before her and the people who helped her achieve this honor. The video and text of her speech can be accessed in Video Clip 12.1.

Video Link

Halle Berry's Oscar Acceptance Speech

http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/halleberryoscarspeech.htm

Toast

Cheers, *slainte*, *skal*, *prost*, and *salud*! All these words could form the basis for a toast, which is a ceremonial speech that praises or conveys goodwill or blessings in honor of a person, accomplishment, or event.



Coworkers may toast the successful completion of a big project.

Didriks – A Toast to Summer – CC BY 2.0.

Toasts are usually the shortest special-occasion speech, which is good since people's arms get tired if they have to hold their drink up in the air for too long. The degree of preparation needed for a toast varies more than any other special-occasion speech type. Some toasts are practically spontaneous and will therefore have to be impromptu. People can toast an accomplishment, completion of a task, a holiday such as New Year's Eve, a favorite sports team winning, or the anniversary of a special event. Wedding toasts are more formal and more preparation is needed and expected. Although toasts are generally supposed to be conversational and appear spontaneous, because that makes the content seem more genuine, in situations that are more formal or where there is much at stake, brief notes are OK. You wouldn't want to see a person giving a toast pull out a stack of note cards, though.

Toasts are definitely a time to include a brief personal anecdote and/or humor, but always make sure to test your story or joke out on someone who knows you and knows the person or people you will be toasting. As I've already warned, using humor in a speech can be dangerous, since most people who try to use humor publicly think they are funnier than they actually are. Not having someone else vet your toast material can lead to embarrassment for many people. Aside from having someone review your content, it's also a good idea to not get too "toasty" before you deliver your toast, or the story or joke that you decided to leave out earlier may find its way back into the speech. Awkward and embarrassing toasts make funny scenes in movies and television shows, but they usually go smoother in real life, especially if you follow the previous advice. You can also spice up your toast by adding a cultural flair. You can see how to say "Cheers!" in many different languages at the following link: http://www.awa.dk/glosary/slainte.htm.

Speech of Tribute

A speech of tribute is a longer and more formal version of a toast that establishes why a person, group, or concept is worthy of praise. Speeches of tribute can honor a group, organization, or concept but usually focus on one person. To effectively pay tribute to someone, introduce the personality of the individual, the values of the group, or the noble history of the event in order to initiate a relationship between the audience and the person, group, or idea that is being honored. Speeches of tribute shouldn't be biographical sketches. Most people can look up a person's bio or the history of a group or event quickly using the Internet, so sharing that information doesn't show that you've done any more work than an audience member could do in the five or ten minutes of the speech. People, groups, or events worthy of speeches of tribute have usually accomplished great things and have enriching lessons to share. As a speaker, use a narrative style to convey to the audience a lesson or a "moral of the story." It's important to focus on the positive aspects of a person or group's history; this is not the occasion to offer criticism.

Eulogy

A eulogy is a speech honoring a person who has died. The emotions and grief surrounding the loss of a loved one are difficult to manage and make this one of the most challenging types of speech. However, being asked to deliver a eulogy is an honor. Such speakers are usually chosen because the family and friends of the deceased person see the speaker as someone they can depend on in difficult situations and as someone who can comfort and be an example to others. In the short amount of time you have to prepare a eulogy, usually a day or two, it is important to put time into organizing the speech, just as you would for a professional speech. Create an outline, and structure the speech with an introduction, a body with about three main points, and a conclusion. A eulogy, like a speech of tribute, shouldn't be a chronological outline of a person's life or a biographical sketch (Lustig, 2012). As with a speech of tribute, focus on the person's personality and demonstrate why the person was likable and what he or she added to your life and the lives of others.

Depending on the situation, you may also want to share some of the deceased's accomplishments. Accomplishments can usually be broken up into three categories, and you may focus on one or more depending on your relationship with the person. Family accomplishments usually entail discussing the loved ones the person is leaving behind or conveying the roles he or she played as a member of his or her family and friendship circles. Professional accomplishments deal with academic and career achievement and would be especially relevant if the person speaking worked with or had a mentoring relationship with the deceased. Community accomplishments include civic engagement, community service, and local involvement. Most people have too many accomplishments to include, so include those that are relevant to your relationship with the deceased and that you think will elicit similar fond memories in others. Focus on the positives of a person's life, and acknowledge and share in the sorrow of the other people in attendance. Remember, as the person chosen to deliver a eulogy, you set an example and provide comfort to others, which is a difficult but important role to play.

Speaking as an Advocate in Personal and Civic Contexts

People are often required or expected to speak as part of their academic or professional duties. However, there may also be times when you are compelled to speak or choose to speak because you care about a topic or an issue. Advocacy speaking occurs in contexts that are civic and/or personal, such as at a city council meeting, at a student group meeting, when you post a link on your Facebook page asking your friends to sign a petition, or when you encourage your friends to vote.



Figure: Advocacy speaking brings attention to a particular cause or issue in order to raise awareness and create social change. An Blackledge – Advocacy – CC BY 2.0.

In the 1950s, radio broadcast pioneer Edward R. Murrow hosted a brief radio segment on which people read essays about their beliefs and lives. Fifty years later, the concept was reborn on National Public Radio and is now an ongoing national project that still produces radio segments, has a free podcast, and produces books. This I Believe speeches encourage people to use the power of their voice to speak from a personal context in a way can inspire, motivate, and resonate with others. In such cases, we can see that personal speeches can cross into civic contexts. Using personal narratives as a basis for advocacy and social change is not

new, as stories have been used to move people to action in many historical situations. Personal testimony, witnesses of injustice, and people sharing their everyday experiences can have a powerful effect on the world. I have enjoyed having my students do This I Believe speeches, and even if this isn't a speech assignment in your class, it is a good way to practice your speaking and writing skills, and it can be fun and inspirational.

Here are some guidelines for the This I Believe speech. Tell a story with your speech and make it personal. Since this speech is about you and your belief, use personal pronouns like *I* and *we* and connect to your audience by using *you*, *us*, and *our*. Even if the belief you are focusing on is abstract, and many are, ground it in events from your life that your audience can relate to. Such events or moments may include instances when your belief was formed, tested, or changed. The core belief should be something that can be easily summed up as a thesis statement and elaborated on and supported in the main points. Be positive in your speech by focusing on what you believe, not what you don't believe. Don't make this a soapbox speech, and don't use the speech to preach or editorialize.[1] You can listen to and/or read many examples of these speeches at the following National Public Radio link: http://www.npr.org/series/4538138/this-i-believe. The following is the text of a This I Believe speech delivered by one of my students.

The Power of the Voice: by Matthew Cain

I believe in the power of the voice. The human voice transforms and changes a person's life. I am an example of the voice's power to change.

When I was young, I didn't use my voice to speak at first. I would use my hands to gesture what I wanted or needed. It was not until the age of two that I started to talk. Right away, my parents knew my voice was different. I stammered, stuttered, and could not say my Rs. My parents thought, however, that this was just a phase. It wasn't until I started school that problems arose. As kindergarten started, I felt different. I did not fit in. I don't mean fitting in socially, but fitting in with my voice. As each of my schoolmates stood to say the alphabet, I did not want to. It wasn't because I didn't know it, but because I couldn't say it. However, I stood up and began to speak: A,...B,...C,...D, and so on. As I finally reached Q, my teacher stopped me. "What are you doing?" she asked. So, I started to say it over; I failed.

I went through the next months in embarrassment. Even though students pointed and laughed, no one outside the school knew of the embarrassment I was feeling. It wasn't until my teacher gave me my progress report that my parents saw how my voice altered my education. The first meeting my parents had with my teacher proved that my voice did have an effect on my education. I listened outside as a peaceful meeting turned into a shouting match. With words flying, my parents and the teacher finally reached a conclusion. The conclusion was that I needed speech therapy. It would begin the next year.

Starting on the first day of first grade, I would go to speech therapy every other day. My embarrassment grew with every grade that I moved through. When my speech teacher came to my classroom to get me, everyone looked at me. What was in their mind, I could only guess. Thoughts like "What a freak!" or "What's wrong with him?" flew through my mind. However, over the next five years, my speech did improve. My stuttering slowed and my speech became clearer. By the time I reached middle school, life was getting better. Speech after speech, I became less sensitive to my impairment and to people's reaction.

During my last year of middle school, I was required to take a public speaking class. I feared this class. I feared the class because I would be giving up to four speeches, the most I have ever done. My teacher told us we could pick the topic for our last speech. Being a fan of history, I chose to talk about World War Two. When I completed my eight-minute speech, everyone looked at me with disbelief. My friend, Garrett, told me, "You did not stutter!" It was then that I realized that when I talk about things I enjoy, I don't stutter...as much. High school caused a dramatic change in my life. After a few more speeches about history, I decided to become a teacher. I knew I would not let my speech affect the rest of my life.

The power of the human voice shaped my life. Every time I give a speech, I remember the past. I learned not to judge others for their speech because I know how it feels. As my voice continues to shape my life, it will undoubtedly change others. That power will not just change the people around me, but the whole world. This I believe.

There are many opportunities to engage in public advocacy, which is engaging people through responsible communication that seeks to make a better world for our loved ones and our communities (Warren & Fassett, 2011). This view of communication acknowledges the power of our words to transform the world around us and that we have an ethical responsibility to advocate for a world that better serves the interests and needs of us all. Speaking as an advocate requires a person to take pause and think about his or her own commitments and responsibilities (Warren & Fassett, 2011). When you are compelled to speak up in the face of an injustice that was committed against you or that you have witnessed being committed against others, you are choosing to take a stand, making a commitment to an issue, and accepting responsibility for your words and actions. Your first steps toward advocacy may be small and uncomfortable. You may not even be sure what issues or causes you care about. Once you know, you

can take small steps, as Gandhi noted, to be the change you want to see in the world. As you take steps to model a desired change and speak out, you will begin to learn more about yourself, your place in the world, and the issues that move you. You will likely then feel more compelled to share that information with others.

Speaking as an advocate doesn't mean you argue for your community or your view at the expense of others. Advocates invite their listeners to engage with them and consider the complexity of an issue. As speakers we have to be open to the perspectives of others as we expect them to be open to ours. This creates an opportunity for growth. Change happens when people choose to change, not when they are forced to change. For change to happen, all parties in an interaction need to be open to dialogue, growth, and transformation (Foss & Foss, 2003).

Teaching is a form of advocacy, but you don't have to be a teacher to teach. We all teach in various capacities as friends, parents, and community members. As we teach, we build bridges between different areas of thoughts and actions. This is a process that helps build communities and alliances. Ask yourself, "What kind of community do I want? What role will I play in creating that community? What work am I willing to do and what sacrifices am I willing to make to create and nurture that community?" (Warren & Fassett, 2011) As speakers, we must seize opportunities we have to speak and use them to talk about socially significant topics that matter to us and our communities. Speaking about these topics invites others who hear us to think about their position in the world and reflect on their own responsibilities as communicators, which can spread advocacy and lead to social change.

"Getting Critical"

Advocacy and Critical Thinking

Being an advocate and responsible citizen in the world means speaking about how we can and should make the world a better place for all as well as listening and thinking critically and compassionately before responding to others' communication (Warren & Fassett, 2011). Critical listening means we can identify flaws within a message we receive and places for positive change. The positive change occurs because critical listening and critical thinking lead to responsible advocacy. Critical listeners don't just tear a message apart because it has flaws. When we engage in compassionate critical listening, we make a genuine effort to hear others and reflect on the complexity of their message rather than closing ourselves off or shutting down because we encounter a message with which we disagree. Since the issues and causes people advocate for are often political and controversial, critical thinking and listening become even more important. When we feel ourselves shutting down or disregarding a person's message without giving it thought, a little alert should go off in our minds to indicate that perhaps we are not engaging in critical compassionate listening. The same alert should go off if we find ourselves wanting to cut someone off or dismiss him or her when that person questions us after we engage in advocacy speaking. Being a critical compassionate listener, however, doesn't mean that we have to give up our own ways of thinking and our own advocacy positions. There is a delicate balance that critical listeners and thinkers try to maintain, as critical thinkers are generous, cautious, and open minded, but wary.

1. As an advocate and a competent communicator, what can you do to try to maintain a critical mind-set that is both open minded and wary?
2. Are there causes that people advocate for that you find it difficult to listen to critically and compassionately? If so, what are they? What can you do to be a better critical and compassionate listener in these situations?

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: While many students view public speaking as a classroom exercise, we are all expected to speak in multiple contexts ranging from personal, to civic, to professional. This chapter can serve as a guide for how public speaking will "pop up" in your life once you've completed this class.
- Ceremonial speeches are intended to praise, pay tribute to, and celebrate individuals or groups in ways that bring audience members together on special occasions. These speeches should be prepared ahead of time, brief, and occasion focused.
  - In a speech of introduction, get to know the person you are introducing, say his or her name correctly several times during the speech, establish his or her credentials, and set the tone of the event.
  - For a speech of welcome, welcome the audience, provide key information about upcoming events, announce any changes to the program, acknowledge sponsors and VIPs, and convey logistical information.
  - When presenting an award, state the name of the award and its purpose, connect the award to the values of the organization presenting it, describe the selection process, acknowledge the winner, share his or her qualifications, and connect him or her to the legacy of the award.

    - When accepting an award, be gracious and humble, thank the group presenting the award, thank fellow nominees, and thank those who helped make your accomplishments possible.
    - When delivering a toast, be spontaneous and genuine, share a personal anecdote, use humor that has been approved by at least one other trusted person, and be brief.
    - When delivering a speech of tribute, demonstrate why the person being honored is worthy of praise, connect to the personality of the individual, do not offer a biographical sketch, and share a "moral of the story."
    - When delivering a eulogy, prepare a well-organized speech so you can still communicate clearly and comfort others despite your own emotions.
- This I Believe speeches encourage people to speak from a personal context in a way that inspires others and crosses into civic engagement. These speeches should be positive, personal, grounded in concrete events, and not preachy.
- Public advocacy speaking occurs mostly in civic contexts and engages people through responsible communication that invites others to listen to diverging viewpoints in a critical and compassionate way to promote social change.
- A thesis statement summarizes the central idea of your speech and will be explained or defended using supporting material. Referencing your thesis statement often will help ensure that your speech is coherent.
- Demographic, psychographic, and situational audience analysis help tailor your speech content to your audience.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: This section discusses speaking in personal and/or civic contexts. Recall an experience you have already had with this type of speaking. How does your experience compare with the content in this section? Did you follow any of these guidelines? What might you do differently next time?
2. Write a speech of introduction for a classmate, friend, family member, or person that you admire.
3. Review the text of the tribute to Al Pacino at the following link: http://www.afi.com/laa/laa07.aspx. How does the speech establish that the honoree is worthy of praise? What elements of the honoree's personality come through in the speech?
4. If you were to write a This I Believe speech, what would you write it on and why? Does your belief connect to public advocacy in some way? Why or why not?

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17.2: Speaking in Academic Settings

Learning Objectives

1. Identify strategies for adapting presentations in the following disciplines: arts and humanities, social sciences, education/training and development, science and math, and technical courses.
2. Identify strategies for effective speaking at academic conferences.

Oral communication has always been a part of higher education, and communication skills in general became more of a focus for colleges and universities in the late part of the twentieth century, as the first "communication across the curriculum" programs began to develop. These programs focus on the importance of writing and speaking skills for further academic, professional, and civic development. Your school may very well have a communication across the curriculum program that includes requirements for foundational speaking and writing skills that are then built on in later classes. Whether your school has a communication across the curriculum program or not, it is important to know that the skills you develop in this class serve as a scaffold from which you can continue to build and develop speaking skills that are tailored to the needs of your particular field of study. As you participate in oral communication within and about your field of study, you become socialized into the discipline-specific ways of communicating necessary to be successful in that field. This communicative process starts in the classroom (Dannels, 2001).

Speaking to Professors and Classmates

What does a good communicator in a science class look and sound like? What does a good communicator in a history class look and sound like? While there will be some overlap in the answers to those questions, there are also specific differences based on the expectations for oral communication within those fields of study. Knowing that speaking is context specific can help you learn which presentation style will earn you a better grade based on the discipline and the course (Dannels, 2001).



Students are often asked to think of a classroom presentation as a simulation of a speaking situation they may encounter in their desired career.

Tulane Public Relations – School Social Work-8 – CC BY 2.0.

Although instructors try to bring professional contexts into the classroom, students have difficulty or avoid engaging with a "made-up" customer or company. Making a more conscious effort to view the classroom as a training ground that simulates, but doesn't replicate, the environment of your chosen career field can make your transition from student to practitioner more successful (Dannels, 2000). While students know they are being graded and their primary audience is their professor, you and your classmates are also audience members in the class who can use the opportunity to practice communicating in ways relevant

to your career path in addition to completing the assignment and getting a good grade.

Social Sciences

Social sciences include psychology, sociology, criminology, and political science, among others. Speaking in the social sciences is driven by quantitative or qualitative data reviewed in existing literature or from original research projects that focus on historical or current social issues. Social scientists often rely on quantitative and/or qualitative research and evidence in their presentations. Qualitative research focuses on describing and interpreting social phenomena using data collected through methods such as participant observation and interviewing—in short, watching and/or talking to people. Qualitative researchers value the subjectivity that comes from individual perspectives and seek to capture the thoughts and feelings of research participants and convey them using descriptive writing that allows readers to think, see, and feel along with the participant. Quantitative social scientists use statistics to provide evidence for a conclusion and collect data about social phenomena using methods such as surveys and experiments. Since these methods are more controlled, the information gathered is turned into numerical data that can be statistically analyzed. Rather than valuing subjectivity and trying to see the world through the perspective of their research subjects, as qualitative researchers do, quantitative researchers seek to use data to describe and explain social phenomena in objective and precise ways so their findings can be generalized to larger populations. Knowing what counts as credible data for each type of research is an important part of speaking in the social sciences. Some social scientists use qualitative and quantitative research, but many people have a preferred method, and individual instructors may expect students to use one or the other.

Presentations in the social sciences usually connect to historical or current social issues. Students may be expected to conduct a literature review on a particular societal issue related to race or poverty, for example. When presenting a literature review, students are expected to review a substantial number of primary sources and then synthesize them together to provide insight into an issue. Many students make a mistake of simply summarizing articles in a literature review. Students should put various authors in conversation with one another by comparing and contrasting the various perspectives and identifying themes within the research.

Students in social work and political science courses may be asked to evaluate or propose policies relevant to a societal issue. Reviewing information about persuasive speeches, discussed earlier, that include propositions of policy may be helpful. This type of presentation involves researching current and proposed legislation and may involve comparing and contrasting policies in one area with policies in another. A student in a social work class may be asked to investigate policies in urban areas related to homeless youth. A political science student may be asked to investigate the political arguments used in states that have passed “right to work” legislation. In any case, presentations in the social sciences may be informative or persuasive but should be socially relevant and research based.

Arts and Humanities

Speaking in the arts and humanities usually involves critiquing, reviewing, or comparing and contrasting existing literature, art, philosophies, or historical texts in ways that connect the historical and contemporary. It may also involve creating and explaining original works of art. Students in the arts may give presentations on fine arts like painting and sculpting or performing arts like theater and dance. Students in the humanities may present in courses related to philosophy, English, and history, among other things.



Students in the arts present original works to their professors and classmates.

Jon Ross – Art work – newspaper project on wall collected – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Research in these fields is based more on existing texts and sources rather than data created through original research as in the sciences and social sciences. In the arts, students may be expected to create an original final product to present, which may entail explaining the inspiration and process involved in creating a sculpture or actually performing an original dance or song. In either case, there is an important visual component that accompanies presentations. In the humanities, visual support is not as central as it is in many other fields (Dannels, 2001). Given that the humanities rely primarily on existing texts for information, students may be asked to synthesize and paraphrase information in a literature review, just as a student in the social sciences would. Frequently, students in the arts and humanities are asked to connect a work of art, a literary work, a philosophy, or a historical event to their own lives and/or to present day society. Students may also be asked to compare and contrast works of art, literature, or philosophies, which requires synthesis and critical thinking skills.

The arts and humanities also engage in criticism more than other fields. Being able to give and receive constructive criticism is very important, especially since many people take their art or their writing personally. Some projects are even juried, meaning that an artist needs to be prepared to engage with several instructors or selected judges and explain their work and process through feedback and constructive criticism.

Education/Training and Development

Speaking in education/training and development involves students delivering a lecture, facilitating a discussion, or running an activity as if they were actually teaching or training. In each of these cases, students will be evaluated on their ability to present content in a progressive way that builds new knowledge from existing knowledge, interact with their audience (students or trainees), and connect their content to the bigger picture or the overarching objectives for the lesson and course. Teachers and trainers also need to be able to translate content into relevant examples and present for long periods of time, adapting as they go to fit the changing class dynamics. All levels of the education and training and development fields include a focus on the importance of communication and public speaking. Listening is also a central part of teaching and training. Aside from being judged on how technical information is broken down as a speaker in a technical class may be, speakers in education and training are evaluated more on their nonverbal communication.

Immediacy behaviors are important parts of teaching and training. Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal communication patterns that indicate a teacher's approachability. Effective use of immediacy behaviors helps reduce perceived distance between the teacher and student or trainer and trainee. Some immediacy behaviors include changes in vocal pitch, smiling, leaning in toward a person, nodding, providing other positive nonverbal feedback while listening, and using humor effectively. Teachers who are more skilled at expressing immediacy receive higher evaluations, and their students learn more (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). Immediacy behaviors are important for lecturing, facilitating, and interacting with students or trainees one-on-one.

Tips for Effective Lectures (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011)

- Put content that you are excited about in lectures.
- Move around to engage the audience; don't get stuck behind a lectern or computer.
- Actually write out examples; don't expect them to "come to you" as you lecture.
- Include notes to yourself to stop and ask for questions or pose a direct question to the audience.
- Start the lecture by connecting to something the audience has already learned, and then say what this lecture will add to their knowledge and how it fits into what will be learned later in the class.
- Do not lecture for more than twenty minutes without breaking it up with something more interactive.

Tips for Effective Discussion Facilitation (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011)

- Start the discussion off with an example that connects to something the audience is familiar with.
- Do not be afraid of silence. Pose the question. Repeat it or rephrase it once if needed and then wait for a response. Too often facilitators pose a question, wait a second, repeat and rephrase the question to the point that everyone is confused, and then end up answering their own question.
- Listen supportively and do not move from one person to the next without responding to his or her comment verbally and nonverbally. Use this as an opportunity to pivot from a response back to the topic of discussion, to another example, or to another person.
- Spend time making good discussion questions. Good discussion questions usually contain a sentence or two that sets up the context for the question. The question should be open ended, not "yes or no." Have follow-up questions prepared to move the discussion along.
- If students/trainees are not actively participating, you can have them write a brief response first, then share it with a neighbor, then come back to group discussion. This is the "think, pair, share" method.

"Getting Plugged In"

Online Teaching and Learning

Online courses are becoming more common. You may have even taken an online course or may be taking this class online. Although we have an understanding of how the typical classroom functions, since we have been socialized into it, the online classroom presents a whole new set of variables and challenges. Some of our past classroom experiences will be relevant and some will not. Many online instructors and students are expected to "figure it out" as they go, which leads to frustrated teachers and students (Ragan, 2011). We'll learn some tips for making online teaching and learning more effective for instructors and students next. The amount of research and information available about online teaching and learning has increased dramatically in recent years, so there is much more information that isn't included here. More resources for online teaching and learning can be found at the following link: http://www.eiu.edu/adulted/online_tips.php.

Tips for Instructors

- Set a schedule and keep to it. A major difference between a brick-and-mortar classroom and an online classroom is the asynchronous nature. In most cases, the instructor and individual students can do their class work at different times rather than all together at scheduled times. This is a major reason for popularity of online courses, since a busy professional, single parent, or member of the military can get a college education on his or her own time frame. You can preserve this flexibility while still providing structure by grading assignments promptly, setting regular days and times for course updates, and charting a progressive path with start and end dates for lessons/units so that students aren't completing all the work during the last week of class.
- Reveal online materials as they are relevant. Don't have everything for the whole semester visible, as it can be overwhelming and difficult to navigate.
- Monitor and manage student progress by communicating with students about missed and upcoming assignments. Online students are expected to be more independent, but the instructor should still serve as a guide.
- Create a "frequently asked questions" document that addresses common areas of concern for students, and allow students to pose new questions so you can add them to the document.
- Do informal assessments to check in with students to get feedback on the course. Don't wait for end-of-semester evaluations. Ask them what they like about the course and for suggestions for improvement.

- Find ways to make the course interactive: create a “questions forum” where students can ask questions like they would by raising their hand in class; use peer learning to have students engage with each other about the content; use images, audio, and video; and use real-time chats or video conferencing.

Tips for Students

- Schedule a time to do your online class work that works for your schedule and stick to it. Make sure that the time spent engaged directly with the course at least equals the amount a regular class would meet, typically about three hours a week for a sixteen-week semester. This doesn’t include homework and study time, which will also need to be scheduled in.
- Since technology is the primary channel for your learning, plan ahead for how you will deal with technological failures. Identify an additional place where you can access the Internet if necessary. Keep all your course documents backed up on a thumb drive so you can do course work “on the go” on computers other than your own.
- Ask questions when you have them so you don’t get lost and behind.
- Practice good “netiquette” when communicating with your instructor and classmates.

1. What are some positives and negatives of online learning—from a teacher’s perspective and from a student’s perspective?
2. What courses do you think would translate well to an online environment? What courses would be difficult to teach online?

Science and Math

Speaking in science and math usually focuses on using established methods and logic to find and report objective results. Science includes subjects such as biology, physics, and chemistry, and math includes subjects such as statistics, calculus, and math theory. You may not think that communication and public speaking are as central to these courses as they are in the humanities and social sciences—and you are right, at least in terms of public perception. The straightforwardness and objectivity of these fields make some people believe that skilled communication is unnecessary, since the process and results speak for themselves. This is not the case, however, as scientists are increasingly being expected to interact with various stakeholders, including funding sources, oversight agencies, and the public.



Scientists present results of original research.

Craig Anderson – Scientists – CC BY-SA 2.0.

The ability to edit and discern what information is relevant for a presentation is very important in these fields. Scientists and mathematicians are often considered competent communicators when they are concise but cover the material in enough detail

to be understood (Dannels, 2001). Poster presentations are common methods of public communication in science and math and are an excellent example of when editing skills are valuable. Posters should be professional looking and visually appealing and concisely present how the information being presented conforms to expected scientific or logical methods. It is difficult, for example, to decide what details from each step of the scientific method should be included on the poster. The same difficulties emerge in oral scientific research reports, which also require a speaker to distill complex information into a limited time frame. Research shows that common critiques by biology instructors of student presentations include going over the time limit and rambling (Bayer, Curto, & Kriley, 2005). Some presentations may focus more on results while others focus more on a method or procedure, so it's important to know what the expectations for the presentation are. Scientists also engage in persuasive speaking. Scientists' work is funded through a variety of sources, so knowing how to propose a research project using primary-source scientific data in a persuasive way is important.

Technical Courses

Speaking in technical courses focuses on learning through testing, replication, and design and then translating the technical information involved in those processes into lay terms. Technical courses appear in most disciplines but are more common in fields like computer science, engineering, and fire sciences. Technical vocational courses like welding, electronics, and woodworking would also fall into this category. Some nursing courses and many courses for medical technicians are considered technical courses. There is a perception of technical courses as training grounds where you give people a manual, they memorize it, regurgitate it, and then try to put the skills into practice. If that were the case, then a range of communication skills wouldn't be as necessary. However, the goal of such courses has changed in recent years to focus more on educating professionals rather than training technicians (Dannels, 2000).

Technical courses may include research, but testing, replication, and design are usually more important. A main focus in these courses is to translate technical information into lay terms (Dannels, 2001). A key communication path in technical fields is between professional and customer/client, but you can't just think of the client as the only person for whom the information must be translated. Technical professionals also have to communicate with a range of people along the way, including managers, colleagues, funding sources, machinists, and so on. Team projects are common in technical courses, especially in courses related to design, so being able to work effectively in groups and present information as a group is important. Much of the presentation in technical courses will be data driven, which is informative. While data may be compelling and the merits of a design self-evident for internal audiences, external audiences will require more information, and selling ideas requires persuasive speaking skills. To help prepare students in technical courses to adapt to these various audiences, instructors often use assignments that ask students to view their classmates and instructor as customers, colleagues, or funding sources that they might encounter once in their career. As was noted earlier, students may not take these simulations seriously, which is a missed opportunity for applied, practical learning.

Speaking at Academic Conferences

Undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and administrators have opportunities to present at academic conferences, which are local, regional, national, or international events at which students, teachers, professionals, and practitioners gather to discuss and share knowledge in a particular field of study. Presenting at or even attending a conference can be intimidating. The National Communication Association provides useful resources on the "how to" of academic conferencing including frequently asked questions and professional standards and guidelines that will be helpful when preparing for any conference: http://natcom.org/conventionresources.



Figure: Students and faculty from all fields of study have opportunities to present at academic conferences. University of Central Arkar Studying – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

When planning a presentation at an academic conference, you should spend time creating a "sexy" and descriptive title. You want something "sexy," meaning that it gets people's attention and connects to a current and relevant topic, and descriptive, so that people can get a sense for what the presentation will include. Most conferences have numerous concurrent sessions running, so in a way, you are competing with people in other rooms who are speaking at the same time slot. Getting people in the room is important for networking to take place. The blog entry at the following link contains useful information about "How to Write Killer Conference Session Titles That Attract Attendees": http://jeffhurtblog.com/2010/03/17/h.erence-session -titles-that-attract-attendees.

A frequent complaint about conference presentations stems from speakers who try to cram too much information into their ten-minute time slot. Presenters at academic conferences are usually presenting recently completed original research or research that is in progress. The papers that are submitted for review for the conference are usually about twenty-five to thirty pages long. It would take about an hour to present the whole paper, but since most conferences occur as part of a panel, with four to five speakers and a seventy-five-minute time slot, each speaker usually gets between ten and fifteen minutes to present. Therefore conference presenters must use their editing skills to cut their papers down to fit their time limit. As we've already learned in Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech", writing something that will be read and writing something that will be listened to are two different styles of writing and require different skill sets. So hacking your twenty-five-page paper down to five pages isn't enough, as you also need to translate that writing into an oral style. Even at communication conferences, where presenters definitely "know better," I've seen people try to speed read their way through a ten- to twelve-page paper because they could only bring themselves to cut it down by half. As a writer, I know it's difficult to cut your own work down, because we often think that everything is important, but it's really not, and even if it was, there's no time to go over it all. So, since almost all presenters at academic conferences are faced with the same problem of too much information and too little time, it's important to adapt the paper to a completely different structure than the original form in order to effectively achieve your speaking goals. Additionally, it's very difficult to anticipate how many people will attend your conference session—it may be forty, or two. I usually prepare a typically formal conference presentation for an audience of ten to thirty people, but I am also prepared to do something more informal. Especially in situations where there are more panelists than audience members, I've found it useful to just make a circle with chairs and have a more informal and interactive discussion.

When preparing the presentation, follow these steps: determine the take-home message, determine the main question, add supporting material, and compose the introduction and conclusion (Morgan & Whitener, 2006). The "take-home message" is the one concept or finding that captures the combined importance of all the data and findings. This is what the speaker wants the audience to have memorized by the end of the speech. It provides a theme or thread for the whole presentation and can therefore be used to help determine what needs to stay in the presentation and what should be left out. This functions like the thesis statement of a typical informative or persuasive speech. The next step in preparing the presentation is identifying the main question. The main question will be answered in the talk through the presentation of data and findings. The take-home message should be related to the main question, perhaps even answer it, as this provides a logical flow for the presentation. Explicitly stating the take-home message and main question in the speech helps the audience process the information and helps

a speaker keep only the information relevant to them, which helps prevent information overload. The following link contains some information from the National Communication Association about "How to Make the Most of Your Presentation": http://natcom.org/Tertiary.aspx?id=1763.

Key Takeaways

- The need for public speaking skills extends beyond this classroom to other parts of academia but will vary based on your discipline. Knowing how to speak in discipline-specific ways can help you be a more successful student.
- Student speakers in the social sciences present reviews of existing research or the results of original quantitative or qualitative research related to current social issues.
- Student speakers in the arts and humanities critique, review, and compare and contrast existing art, literature, and historical texts. Students are also asked to paraphrase and synthesize existing texts and connect past art or literature to contemporary society.
- Student speakers in education/training and development lecture, facilitate discussion, and run activities as if they were actually teaching or training. Students need to be able to break down complex concepts and progressively build on them while sharing examples and connecting to the bigger picture of the course. Students will also be evaluated on nonverbal immediacy behaviors.
- Student speakers in science and math courses deliver presentation content based on the scientific method and systems of logic. Students may focus on sharing the results of a research project or problem or focus on a specific method or procedure related to science or math.
- Student speakers in technical courses present "how-to" information regarding mechanical or information processes. They also translate technical information for lay audiences. Presentation content is often data driven, but products and designs must still be sold to various audiences, so persuasive skills are also important.
- Presentations at academic conferences must be severely edited to fit time frames of approximately ten minutes. Many speakers try to cram too much information into their time frame. Narrow your presentation down to an introduction, an interrogation of a main question, and a concluding take-home message.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: Does your major or career interest fall into the social sciences, arts and humanities, education/training and development, science and math, or technical courses? Which strategies for speaking in that area have you already witnessed among your professors or classmates? Which strategies do you think will be most helpful for you to learn/improve on? Which are you already doing well on?
2. Identify an academic conference related to your desired career field and visit the conference association's website. When is the conference? How do you submit to attend? Do they have any advice listed for presenting at their conference? If so, compare and contrast the advice they offer with the advice in this chapter.

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17.3: Speaking in Business Settings

Learning Objectives

1. Employ audience analysis to adapt communication to supervisors, colleagues, employees, and clients.
2. Explain the role of intercultural communication competence in intercultural business communication contexts.
3. Identify strategies for handling question-and-answer periods.
4. Identify strategies for effectively planning and delivering common business presentations, including briefings, reports, training, and meetings.

Most people's goal for a college degree is to work in a desired career field. Many of you are probably working while taking this class and already have experience with speaking in business settings. As you advance in your career, and potentially change career paths as many Americans do now, the nature of your communication and the contexts in which you speak will change. Today's workers must be able to adapt content, level of formality, and format to various audiences including the public, clients, and colleagues (Dannels, 2001). What counts as a good communicator for one audience and in one field may not in another. There is wide variety of research and resources related to business communication that cannot be included in this section. The International Association of Business Communicators is a good resource for people interested in a career in this area: http://www.iabc.com.

Adapt to Your Audience

Speaking in business settings requires adaptability as a communicator. Hopefully the skills that you are building to improve your communication competence by taking this class will enable you to be adaptable and successful. The following suggestions for adapting to your audience are based on general characteristics; therefore expect variations and exceptions. A competent communicator can use categories and strategies like these as a starting point but must always monitor the communication taking place and adapt as needed. In many cases, you may have a diverse audience with supervisors, colleagues, and employees, in which case you would need to employ multiple strategies for effective business communication.

Even though much of the day-to-day communication within organizations is written in the form of memos, e-mails, and reports, oral communication has an important place. The increase in documentation is related to an epidemic of poor listening. Many people can't or don't try to retain information they receive aurally, while written communication provides a record and proof that all the required and detailed information was conveyed. An increase in written communication adds time and costs that oral communication doesn't. Writing and reading are slower forms of communication than speaking, and face-to-face speaking uses more human senses, allows for feedback and clarification, and helps establish relationships (Nichols & Stevens, 1999).



Figure 17.3.1: Much communication in the workplace is written for the sake of documentation. Oral communication, however, is often more efficient if people practice good listening skills. Queen's University – Alumn i Volunteer Summit – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

It's important to remember that many people do not practice good listening skills and that being understood contributes to effectiveness and success. You obviously can't make someone listen better or require him or her to listen actively, but you can strive to make your communication more listenable and digestible for various audiences.

Speaking to Executives/Supervisors

Upward communication includes speeches, proposals, or briefings that are directed at audience members who hold higher positions in the organizational hierarchy than the sender. Upward communication is usually the most lacking within an organization, so it is important to take advantage of the opportunity and use it to your advantage (Nichols & Stevens, 1999). These messages usually function to inform supervisors about the status or results of projects and provide suggestions for improvement, which can help people feel included in the organizational process and lead to an increased understanding and acceptance of management decisions (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005). So how do we adapt messages for upward communication?

The "executive summary" emerged from the fact that executives have tightly scheduled days and prefer concise, relevant information. Executive summaries are usually produced in written form but must also be conveyed orally. You should build some repetition and redundancy into an oral presentation of an executive summary, but you do not need such repetition in the written version. This allows you to emphasize a main idea while leaving some of the supporting facts out of an oral presentation. If an executive or supervisor leaves a presentation with a clear understanding of the main idea, the supporting material and facts will be meaningful when they are reviewed later. However, leaving a presentation with facts but not the main idea may result in the need for another presentation or briefing, which costs an organization time and money. Even when such a misunderstanding is due to the executives' poor listening skills, it will likely be you who is blamed.

Employees want to be seen as competent, and demonstrating oral communication skills is a good way to be noticed and show off your technical and professional abilities (Bartolome, 1999). Presentations are "high-visibility tasks" that establish a person's credibility when performed well (Weinholdt, 2006). Don't take advantage of this visibility to the point that you perform only for the boss or focus on him or her at the expense of other people in the audience. Do, however, tailor your message to the "language of executives." Executives and supervisors often have a more macro perspective of an organization and may be concerned with how day-to-day tasks match with the mission and vision of the organization. So making this connection explicit in your presentation can help make your presentation stand out.

Be aware of the organizational hierarchy and territory when speaking to executives and supervisors. Steering into terrain that is under someone else's purview can get you in trouble if that person guards his or her territory (McCaskey, 1999). For example, making a suggestion about marketing during a presentation about human resources can ruffle the marketing manager's feathers and lead to negative consequences for you. Also be aware that it can be challenging to deliver bad news to a boss. When delivering bad news, frame it in a way that highlights your concern for the health of the organization. An employee's reluctance to discuss problems with a boss leads to more risk for an organization (Bartolome, 1999). The sooner a problem is known, the better for the

organization.

Speaking to Colleagues

Much of our day-to-day communication in business settings is horizontal communication with our colleagues or people who are on the same approximate level in the organizational hierarchy. This communication may occur between colleagues working in the same area or between colleagues with different areas of expertise. Such horizontal communication usually functions to help people coordinate tasks, solve problems, and share information. When effective, this can lead to more cooperation among employees and a greater understanding of the "big picture" or larger function of an organization. When it is not effective, this can lead to territoriality, rivalry, and miscommunication when speaking across knowledge and task areas that require specialization (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005).

Many colleagues work collaboratively to share ideas and accomplish tasks together. In a sharing environment, it can be easy to forget where an idea started. This becomes an issue when it comes time for credit or recognition to be given. Make sure to give credit to people who worked with you on a project or an idea. If you can't remember where an idea came from, it may be better to note that it was a "group effort" than to assume it was yours and risk alienating a colleague.

Speaking to Supervisees/Employees

Downward communication includes messages directed at audience members who hold a lower place on the organizational hierarchy than the sender. As a supervisor, you will also have to speak to people whom you manage or employ. Downward communication usually involves job instructions, explanations of organizational policies, providing feedback, and welcoming newcomers to an organization.



Figure 17.3.2: Supervisors can set a good example by keeping a good flow of information going to their employees. Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

This type of communication can have positive results in terms of preventing or correcting employee errors and increasing job satisfaction and morale. If the communication is not effective, it can lead to unclear messages that lead to misunderstandings and mistakes (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005).

During this type of "top-down" communication, employees may not ask valuable questions. So it is important to create an open atmosphere that encourages questions. Even though including an open discussion after a presentation takes more time, it helps prevent avoidable mistakes and wasted time and money. Let your audience know before a presentation that you will take questions, and then officially open the floor to questions when you are ready. Question-and-answer sessions are a good way to keep information flowing in an organization, and there is more information about handling these sessions in the "Getting Competent" box in this chapter.

A good supervisor should keep his or her employees informed, provide constructive feedback, explain the decisions and policies of the organization, be honest about challenges and problems, and facilitate the flow of information (Bartolome, 1999). Information should flow to and away from supervisors. Supervisors help set the tone for the communication climate of an organization and can serve as models of expectations of oral communication. Being prepared, consistent, open, and engaging helps sustain communication, which helps sustain morale. Supervisors also send messages, intentional or unintentional, based on where they deliver their presentations. For example, making people come to the executive conference room may be convenient for the boss but intimidating for other workers (Larkin & Larkin, 1999).

Speaking to Clients / Customers / Funding Sources

Communication to outside stakeholders includes messages sent from service providers to people who are not employed by the organization but conduct business with or support it. These stakeholders include clients, customers, and funding sources. Communication to stakeholders may be informative or persuasive. When first starting a relationship with one of these stakeholders, the communication is likely to be persuasive in nature, trying to convince either a client to take services, a customer to buy a product, or a funding source to provide financing. Once a relationship is established, communication may take the form of more informative progress reports and again turn persuasive when it comes time to renegotiate or renew a contract or agreement.

As with other types of workplace communication, information flow is important. Many people see a lack of information flow as a sign of trouble, so make sure to be consistent in your level of communication through progress reports or status briefings even if there isn't a major development to report. Strategic ambiguity may be useful in some situations, but too much ambiguity also leads to suspicions that can damage a provider-client relationship. Make sure your nonverbal communication doesn't contradict your verbal communication.

When preparing for a presentation to clients, customers, or funding sources, start to establish a relationship before actually presenting. This will help you understand what they want and need and will allow you to tailor your presentation to their needs. These interactions also help establish rapport, which can increase your credibility. Many people making a proposal mistakenly focus on themselves or their product or service. Focus instead on the needs of the client. Listen closely to what they say and then explain their needs as you see them and how your product or service will satisfy those needs (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005). Focus on the positive consequences or benefits that will result from initiating a business relationship with you. If you'll recall from the chapter titled "Informative and Persuasive Speaking", this is similar to Monroe's Motivated Sequence organization pattern, which gets the audience's attention, establishes the existence of a need or problem, presents a solution to fill the need, asks the audience to visualize positive results of adopting the solution, and then calls the audience to action.

Use sophisticated and professional visual aids to help sell your idea, service, or product. You can use strategies from our earlier discussion of visual aids, but add a sales twist. Develop a "money slide" that gets the audience's attention with compelling and hopefully selling content that makes audience members want to reach for their pen to sign a check or a contract (Morgan & Whitener, 2006).



Figure 17.3.3: Include a “money slide” in your presentation to potential clients or customers that really sells your idea. Yair Aronshtam – Slide projector – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Proposals and pitches may be cut short, so imagine what you would do if you arrived to present and were told that you had to cut it down to one minute. If you were prepared, you could pull out your money slide. The money slide could be the most important finding, a startling or compelling statistic, an instructive figure or chart, or some other combination of text and graphic that connects to the listener. Avoid the temptation to make a complicated money slide. The point isn’t to fit as much as you can onto one slide but to best communicate the most important idea or piece of information you have. A verbal version of the money slide is the elevator speech. This is your sales pitch that captures the highlights of what you have to offer that can be delivered in a short time frame. I recommend developing a thirty-second, one-minute, and two-minute version of your elevator speech and having it on standby at all times.

Speaking in Intercultural Contexts

It’s no surprise that business communication is occurring in more intercultural contexts. Many companies and consulting firms offer cross-cultural training for businesspeople, and college programs in cross-cultural training and international business also help prepare people to conduct business in intercultural contexts. For specific information about conducting business in more than thirty-two countries, you can visit the following link: http://www.cyborlink.com.

While these trainings and resources are beneficial, many people expect intercultural business communication training to be reduced to a series of checklists or rules for various intercultural interactions that may be conveyed in a two-hour, predeparture “everything you need to know about Japanese business culture” training. This type of culture-specific approach to cross-cultural training does not really stand up to the complex situations in which international business communicators find themselves (Victor, 1993). Scholars trained more recently in culture and communication prefer a culture-general approach that focuses on “tools” rather than “rules.” Remember that intercultural competence is relative to the native and host cultures of the people involved in an intercultural encounter, and therefore notions of what is interculturally competent change quickly (Ulijn et al., 2000). To review some of our earlier discussion, elements of intercultural competence involve the ability to identify potential misunderstandings before they occur, be a high self-monitor, and be aware of how self and others make judgments of value (Ulijn et al., 2000).

I will overview some intercultural business communication tips that are more like rules, but remember there are always exceptions, so other competent communication skills should be on standby to help you adapt when the rules approach stops working (Thrush, 1993).

In terms of verbal communication, make sure to use good pronunciation and articulation. Even if you speak a different language than your audience, clearer communication on your part will help the message get through better. Avoid idiomatic expressions and acronyms, since the meaning of those types of verbal communication are usually only known to cultural insiders. Try to use geographically and culturally relevant examples—for example, referencing the World Cup instead of the World Series. Be aware of differences in communication between high- and low-context cultures. Note that people from low-context cultures may feel frustrated by the ambiguity of speakers from high-context cultures, while speakers from high-context cultures may feel

overwhelmed or even insulted by the level of detail used by low-context communicators. The long history of family businesses doing business with family businesses in France means that communication at meetings and in business letters operates at a high context. Dates and prices may not be mentioned at all, which could be very frustrating for an American businessperson used to highly detailed negotiations. The high level of detail used by US Americans may be seen as simplistic or childish to audience members from high-context cultures. Include some materials in the native language or include a glossary of terms if you're using specific or new vocabulary. Don't assume that the audience needs it, but have it just in case.

Also be aware that different cultures interpret graphics differently. Two well-known cases of differing interpretations of graphics involve computer icons. First, the "trash" icon first used on Mac desktops doesn't match what wastebaskets look like in many other countries. Second, the US-style "mailbox" used as an icon for many e-mail programs doesn't match with the mail experiences of people in most other countries and has since been replaced by the much more universally recognizable envelope icon. Nonelectronic symbols also have different cultural meanings. People in the United States often note that they are pursuing the "blue ribbon" prize or standard in their business, which is the color ribbon used to designate second place in the United Kingdom.

"Getting Competent": Handling Question-and-Answer Periods

Question-and-answer (Q&A) periods allow for important interaction between a speaker and his or her audience. Speakers should always be accountable for the content of their speech, whether informative or persuasive, and making yourself available for questions is a good way to demonstrate such accountability. Question-and-answer sessions can take many forms in many contexts. You may entertain questions after a classroom or conference presentation. Colleagues often have questions after a briefing or training. Your supervisor or customers may have questions after a demonstration. Some question-and-answer periods, like ones after sales pitches or after presentations to a supervisor, may be evaluative, meaning you are being judged in terms of your content and presentation. Others may be more information based, meaning that people ask follow-up questions or seek clarification or more detail. In any case, there are some guidelines that may help you more effectively handle question-and-answer periods (Toastmasters International, 2012; Morgan & Whitener, 2006).

Setting the stage for Q&A. If you know you will have a Q&A period after your presentation, alert your audience ahead of time. This will prompt them to take note of questions as they arise, so they don't forget them by the end of the talk. Try to anticipate questions that the audience may have and try to proactively answer them in the presentation if possible; otherwise, be prepared to answer them at the end. At the end of your presentation, verbally and nonverbally indicate that the Q&A session is open. You can verbally invite questions and nonverbally shift your posture or position to indicate the change in format.

Reacting to questions. In evaluative or informative Q&A periods, speakers may feel defensive of their idea, position, or presentation style. Don't let this show to the audience. Remember, accountability is a good thing as a speaker, and audience members usually ask pertinent and valid questions, even if you think they aren't initially. Repeating a question after it is asked serves several functions. It ensures that people not around the person asking the question get to hear it. It allows speakers to start to formulate a response as they repeat the question. It also allows speakers to ensure they understood the question correctly by saying something like "What I hear you asking is..." Once you've repeated the question, respond to the person who posed the question, but also address the whole audience. It is awkward when a speaker just talks to one person. Be cautious not to overuse the statement "That's a good question." Saying that more than once or twice lessens its sincerity.

Keeping the Q&A on track. To help keep the Q&A period on track, tie a question to one of the main ideas from your presentation and make that connection explicit in your response. Having a clearly stated and repeated main idea for your presentation will help set useful parameters for which questions fall within the scope of the presentation and which do not. If someone poses a question that is irrelevant or off track, you can politely ask them to relate it to a main idea from the talk. If they can't, you can offer to talk to them individually about their question after the session. Don't engage with an irrelevant question, even if you know the answer. Answering one "off-track" question invites more, which veers the Q&A session further from the main idea.

Responding to multipart questions. People often ask more than one question at a time. As a speaker and audience member this can be frustrating. Countless times, I have seen a speaker only address the second question and then never get back to the first. By that point, the person who asked the question and the audience have also usually forgotten about the first part of the question. As a speaker, it is perfectly OK to take notes during a Q&A session. I personally take notes to help me address multipart questions. You can also verbally reiterate the question to make sure you know which parts need to be addressed, and then address the parts in order.

Managing "Uh-oh!" moments. If a person corrects something you said in error during your presentation, thank them for the correction. After the presentation, verify whether or not it was indeed a mistake, and if it was, make sure to correct your information so you don't repeat the mistake in future talks. Admit when you don't know the answer to a question. It's better to admit that you do not know the answer than to try to fake your way through it. An audience member may also "correct" you with what you know is incorrect information. In such cases, do not get into a back-and-forth argument with the person; instead, note that the information you have is different and say you will look into it.

Concluding the Q&A session. Finally, take control of your presentation again toward the end of the Q&A session. Stop taking questions in time to provide a brief wrap-up of the questions, reiterate the main idea, thank the audience for their questions, and conclude the presentation. This helps provide a sense of closure and completeness for the presentation.

1. Which of these tips could you have applied to previous question-and-answer sessions that you have participated in to make them more effective?
2. Imagine you are giving a presentation on diversity in organizations and someone asks a question about affirmative action, which was not a part of your presentation. What could you say to the person?
3. In what situations in academic, professional, or personal contexts of your life might you be engaged in an evaluative Q&A session? An information-based Q&A session?

Common Business Presentations

Now you know how to consider your audience in terms of upward, downward, or horizontal communication. You also know some of the communication preferences of common career fields. Now we will turn our attention to some of the most frequent types of business presentations: briefings, reports, training, and meetings.

Briefings

Briefings are short presentations that either update listeners about recent events or provide instructions for how to do something job related (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005). Briefings may occur as upward, downward, or horizontal communication. An industrial designer briefing project managers on the preliminary results of testing on a new product design is an example of upward briefing. A nurse who is the shift manager briefing an incoming shift of nurses on the events of the previous shift is an example of downward briefing. A representative from human resources briefing colleagues on how to use the new workplace identification badges is an example of horizontal briefing. Briefings that provide instructions like how to use a new identification badge are called technical briefings, and they are the most common type of workplace presentation (Toastmasters International, 2012). For technical briefings, consider whether your audience is composed of insiders, outsiders, or a mixture of people different levels of familiarity with the function, operation, and/or specifications of the focus of the briefing. As we have already discussed, technical speaking requires an ability to translate unfamiliar or complex information into content that is understandable and manageable for others.



Figure 17.3.4:Technical briefings, which explain how something functions or works, are the most common type of workplace presentations. Shamim Mohamed – Debrief – CC BY-SA 2.0.

As the name suggests, briefings are *brief*—usually two or three minutes. Since they are content focused, they do not require formal speech organization, complete with introduction and conclusion. Briefings are often delivered as a series of bullet points, organized topically or chronologically. The content of a briefing is usually a summary of information or a series of distilled facts, so there are rarely elements of persuasion in a briefing or much supporting information. A speaker may use simple visual aids, like an object or even a one-page handout, but more complex visual aids are usually not appropriate. In terms of delivery, briefings should be organized. Since they are usually delivered under time constraints and contain important information, brief notes and extemporaneous delivery are effective (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005).

Reports

There are numerous types of reports. The line between a briefing and short oral report is fuzzy, but in general a report is a more substantial presentation on the progress or status of a task. Reports can focus on the past, present, or future. Reports on past events may result from some type of investigation. For example, a company may be interested in finding the cause of a 15 percent decline in revenue for a branch office. Investigative reports are also focused on past events and may include a follow-up on a customer or employee complaint.

Reports on the present are often status or progress reports. Various departments or teams that make up an organization, or committees that make up a governing board, are likely to give status reports. Status reports may focus on a specific project or task or simply report on the regular functioning of a group.

Components of a Status Report (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005)

1. State the group or committee's task or purpose.
2. Describe the current status, including work done by the group and/or individuals and the methods used.
3. Report on obstacles encountered and efforts to overcome them
4. Describe the next goal or milestone of the group and offer concrete action steps and a timeline for achieving the goal.

Final reports are presented at the conclusion of a task and are similar to a progress report but include a discussion and analysis of the results of an effort. While some progress reports may only be delivered verbally, with no written component, a final report almost always has an associated written document. The written final report usually contains much more detail than is included in the oral final report, and this detail is referenced for audience members to consult if they desire more information (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005).

A common future-focused report is the feasibility report, which explores potential actions or steps and then makes recommendations for future action based on methodical evaluation. The purpose of these reports is basically to determine if an action or step is a good idea for an organization. Facebook made a much-discussed move to go public in 2012, a decision that

was no doubt made after analyzing many feasibility reports.

Components of a Feasibility Report (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005)

1. Introduction to a problem or situation and its potential consequences
2. Overview of the standards used for evaluating potential courses of action
3. Overview of process used to identify and evaluate courses of action
4. Details of potential courses of action
5. Evaluation of the potential courses of action
6. Recommendation of best course of action

Training

People in supervisory or leadership positions often provide training, which includes presentations that prepare new employees for their jobs or provide instruction or development opportunities for existing employees. While some training is conducted by inside and outside consultants, the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics notes that about 75 percent of training is delivered informally while on the job (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005). As the training and development field expands, this informal training is likely to be replaced by more formalized training delivered by training professionals, many of whom will be employees of the company who have been certified to train specific areas. Organizations are investing more time and money in training because they recognize the value in having well-trained employees and then regularly adding to that training with continued development opportunities. Common focuses of training include the following:

- **Compliance with company policies.** Includes training and orienting new hires and ongoing training for existing employees related to new or changing company policies.
- **Changing workplace environments.** Diversity training and cross-cultural training for international business.
- **Compliance with legal policies.** Sexual harassment, equal employment, Americans with Disabilities Act, and ethics training.
- **Technical training.** Instructions for software, hardware, and machinery.

Companies are also investing money in training for recent college graduates who have degrees but lack the technical training needed to do a specific job. This upfront investment pays off in many situations, as this type of standardized training in field-specific communication skills and technology can lead to increased productivity.



Figure 17.3.5: Corporate trainers prepare new employees for their jobs and provide development opportunities for existing employe
Louisiana GOHSEP – Employees Attend Training Classes – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Trainers require specific skills and an ability to adapt to adult learners (Ray, 1993). Important training skills include technical skills specific to a discipline, interpersonal skills, organizational skills, and critical thinking skills. Trainers must also be able to adapt to adult learners, who may have more experience than the trainer. Training formats usually include a mixture of information presentation formats such as minilecture and discussion as well as experiential opportunities for trainees to demonstrate

competence such as role-play, simulation, and case-study analysis and application. Trainers should remember that adult learners learn best by doing, have previous experience that trainers can and should draw on, have different motivations for learning than typical students, and have more competing thoughts and distractions. Adult learners often want information distilled down to the "bottom line"; demonstrating how content is relevant to a specific part of their work duties or personal success is important.

Steps in Developing a Training Curriculum(Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004)

1. Do background research based on literature on and observations of the training context you will be in.
2. Conduct a needs assessment to see what sort of training is desired/needed.
3. Develop training objectives based on research, observations, and needs assessment. Objectives should be observable, measurable, attainable, and specific.
4. Develop content that connects to the needs assessment.
5. Determine the time frame for training; make the training as efficient as possible.
6. Determine methods for delivering content that connect with objectives developed earlier.
7. Select and/or create training materials.
8. Create a participant's guide that contains each activity and module of the training.
9. Include the following for each training activity: objectives, training content, time frame, method, and materials needed.
10. Test the training plan on a focus group or with experts in the field to evaluate and revise if necessary.

Meetings

Over eleven million meetings are held each day in the United States, so it is likely that you will attend and lead meetings during your career. Why do we have meetings? The fundamental reason is to get a group of people with different experiences and viewpoints together to share their knowledge and/or solve a problem. Despite their frequency and our familiarity with them, meetings are often criticized for being worthless, a waste of time, and unnecessary. Before you call a meeting, ask yourself if it is necessary, since some issues are better resolved through a phone call, an e-mail, or a series of one-on-one meetings. Ask the following questions to help make sure the meeting is necessary: What is the goal of the meeting? What would be the consequences of not having it? How will I judge whether the meeting was successful or not? (Jay, 1999)

Meetings are important at the early stages of completing a task, as they help define a work team since the members share a space and interact with each other. Subsequent meetings should be called when people need to pool knowledge, refine ideas, consider new information, or deliberate over a decision. Most meetings are committee size, which ranges from three to ten people. The frequency of the meeting will help determine how the meeting should be run. Groups that meet daily will develop a higher level of cohesion and be able to work through an agenda quickly with little review. Most groups meet less frequently, so there typically needs to be a structured meeting agenda that includes informational items, old business, and new business.

In determining the meeting agenda, define the objectives for various items. Some items will be informative, meaning they transmit information and don't require a decision or an action. Other items will be constructive, in that they require something new to be devised or decided, such as determining a new policy or procedure. Once a new policy or procedure has been determined, a group must decide on the executive components of their decision, such as how it will be implemented and who will have responsibilities in the process. As the items progress from informational, to constructive, to executive, the amount of time required for each item increases, which will have an effect on the planning of the agenda (Jay, 1999).

After completing the agenda, continue to plan for the meeting by providing attendees with the agenda and any important supporting or supplementary materials such as meeting minutes or reports ahead of time. Consult with people who will attend a meeting beforehand to see if they have any questions about the meeting and to remind them to review the materials. You can also give people a "heads up" about any items for discussion that may be lengthy or controversial. Make sure the meeting room can accommodate the number of attendees and arrange the seating to a suitable structure, typically one where everyone can see each other. A meeting leader may also want to divide items up as "for information," "for discussion," or "for decision." Start the meeting by sharing the objective(s) that you determined in your planning. This will help hold you and the other attendees accountable and give you something to assess to determine the value of the meeting.

People's attention spans wane after the first twenty minutes of a meeting, so it may be useful to put items that warrant the most attention early on the agenda. It is also a good idea to put items that the group can agree on and will unify around before more controversial items on which the group may be divided. Anything presented at the meeting that wasn't circulated ahead of time should be brief, so people aren't spending the meeting reading through documents. To help expedite the agenda, put the length of time you think will be needed for each item or category of items on the agenda. It is important to know when to move from one item to the next. Sometimes people continue to talk even after agreement has been reached, which is usually a waste of

time. You want to manage the communication within the meeting but still encourage people to speak up and share ideas. Some people take a more hands-on approach to managing the conversation than others. As the president of the graduate student body, I attended a few board of trustees meetings at my university. The chairperson of the committee had a small bell that she would ring when people got off track, engaged in personal conversations, or were being disruptive to the order of the group.

At the end of the meeting make sure to recap what was accomplished. Return to the objective you shared at the beginning and assess whether or not you accomplished it. If people feel like they get somewhere during a meeting, they will think more positively about the next one. Compile the meeting minutes in a timely fashion, within a few days and no more than a week after the meeting (Jay, 1999).

Tips for Running Effective Meetings

1. Distribute an agenda to attendees two to three days in advance of the meeting.
2. Divide items up on the agenda into "for information," "for discussion," and "for decision."
3. Put items that warrant close attention early on the agenda.
4. Since senior attendees' comments may influence or limit junior people's comments, ask for comments from junior attendees first.
5. People sometimes continue talking even after agreement has been reached, so it's important to know when to move on to the next item in the agenda.
6. At the end of a meeting, recap what was accomplished and set goals for the next meeting.
7. Compile meeting minutes within forty-eight hours and distribute them to the attendees.

Key Takeaways

- What counts as being a good communicator in one business context doesn't in another, so being able to adapt to various business settings and audiences will help you be more successful in your career.
- Upward business communication involves communicating messages up the organizational hierarchy. This type of communication is usually the most lacking in organizations. However, since oral presentations are a "high-visibility" activity, taking advantage of these opportunities can help you get noticed by bosses and, if done well, can move you up the organizational ladder. Present information succinctly in an executive summary format, building in repetition of main ideas in the oral delivery that aren't necessary for the written version. Don't just focus on the boss if there are other people present, but do connect to the vision and mission of the organization, since most managers and executives have a "big picture" view of the organization.
- Horizontal communication is communication among colleagues on the same level within an organizational hierarchy. This type of communication helps coordinate tasks and lets people from various parts of an organization get a better idea of how the whole organization functions. Many workplaces are becoming more collaborative and team oriented, but make sure you share credit for ideas and work accomplished collaboratively so as not to offend a colleague.
- Downward communication includes messages traveling down the organizational hierarchy. These messages usually focus on giving instructions, explaining company policies, or providing feedback. As a supervisor, make sure to encourage employees to ask questions following a presentation. Good information flow helps prevent employee errors and misunderstandings, which saves money.
- Initial communication with clients, customers, or funding sources is usually persuasive in nature, as you will be trying to secure their business. Later communication may be more informative status reports. Connect your message to their needs rather than focusing on what you offer. Use persuasive strategies like positive motivation, and always have a "money slide" prepared that gets across the essence of what you offer in one attractive message.
- When adapting business communication to intercultural contexts, take a "tools not rules" approach that focuses on broad and adaptable intercultural communication competence.
- There are various types of business presentations for which a speaker should be prepared:
  - Briefings are short, two- to three-minute "how-to" or "update" presentations that are similar to factual bullet points.
  - Reports can be past, present, or future focused and include status, final, and feasibility reports.
  - Trainings are informal or formal presentations that help get new employees ready for their jobs and keep existing employees informed about changing policies, workplace climates, and legal issues.
- To have an effective meeting, first make sure it is necessary to have, then set a solid foundation by distributing an agenda in advance, manage the flow of communication during the meeting, and take note of accomplishments to promote a positive view of future meetings.

Exercises

1. Identify a recent instance when you engaged in upward, horizontal, downward, or intercultural communication in a business setting. Analyze that communication encounter based on the information in the corresponding section of this chapter. What was done well and what could have been improved?
2. Prepare a briefing presentation on how to prepare a briefing. Make sure to follow the suggestions in the chapter.
3. Think of a time when you received training in a business or academic setting. Was the communication of the trainer effective? Why or why not?

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17.4: Speaking via Electronic Media

Learning Objectives

1. Identify strategies for speaking on radio and television.
2. Describe the communication skills necessary to be a spokesperson.
3. Explain the role of crisis communication professionals.

Although radio and television messages may be broadcast to thousands or millions of people, it is important for speakers to realize they are speaking to individuals, not a crowd. Radio and television both seek to make personal connections with listeners or viewers, but it can be difficult to concentrate on making that connection if you aren't prepared for the microphones, lights, and monitors that may surround you. This section will help you be prepared to speak on the radio, speak on the television, conduct a media interview, and speak on behalf of someone else in a regular or crisis situation.

Speaking on Radio and Television

My current university has rather well-established radio and television broadcasting programs for our students. We have a television station and a radio station that undergraduate students interested in careers in broadcasting get to actually work in to gain experience and hone their skills. At the start of each semester there are some definite rough spots—for example, as I watch a broadcast meteorology major make his or her first appearance in front of the green screen weather map or listen to a radio broadcasting student deliver the hourly news update on the radio. But it is wonderful to be able to watch these young broadcasters improve over the course of the semester, some of them growing to rival the seasoned reporters on our regional network stations.

Radio

Although many people think of radio as an old-fashioned form of media, it is still important in many aspects of life and continues to adapt to changing markets, expanding to include Internet and satellite formats. People may think radio is as easy as sitting in a chair and talking into a microphone, but it takes practice and verbal and nonverbal skills to effectively communicate on the radio (Hyde, 1983). Aside from reading over words without stumbling and ad-libbing content as needed, speaking on the radio requires communicators to interpret and emphasize using their voice. Even though radio is sound only, nonverbal communication is still important. The audience can't see your gestures and facial expressions, but using them makes the verbal delivery more engaging and effective.



Figure 17.4.1: Although the radio reaches thousands of people at a time, radio presenters should imagine that they are connecting with individuals as they speak. Cyclyst – radio dj – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Some people, including me, have "mic fright," which is increased nervousness due to the presence of a microphone (Hyde, 1983). I actually didn't realize that I had mic fright until the first time I was interviewed on the radio. Even after many years of public speaking experience and skill and confidence development, sitting in a radio booth with headphones on and a big microphone in front of me brought on communication anxiety like I hadn't experienced in years. Luckily my segment was recorded to tape, so by the time it aired it had been edited and I didn't sound as nervous and incoherent as I felt in that moment. To help avoid nervousness, practice with a microphone just so you're used to seeing it. Some people's nervousness stems from a dislike of hearing their own voice. Many people don't like the way they sound when recorded, but that's the way we actually sound and the way others hear us, so it's important to get used to hearing our own voice. When we normally hear our voice, we hear what comes out of our mouth and is conducted through the air but also the internal resonance and vibration that happens as our voice is conducted through the bones and structures of our head and neck. Other people only hear the way our voice sounds as conducted through air *without* the added effect of the bone resonance. So, when we hear ourselves recorded, we hear our voice as others hear it, because the recording only captures the air and not the bone vibrations. We may not like it, but everyone else is already used to hearing it that way, because they've never heard our voice the way we hear it.

Here are some final tips for radio communication. Be aware of microphones, and follow instructions for how close or distant your mouth should be from a microphone and what kind of volume you need to use. Avoid rattling papers, popping consonant sounds like *p*, or breathing directly into a microphone. Watch your verbal fillers, even more noticeable on the radio than they are in person or on the television. Many professional radio and television announcers practice a version of American English that doesn't give away any regional affiliation. Unless you are doing this for a career, you do not need to try to change an accent or dialect, as that will probably make you sound strange. Just speak in a natural voice, but make sure to articulate and enunciate your words so you can be understood.

Television

You don't have to be famous to be on television. People are often surprised to find themselves in a situation where they will be on camera. Although many people in the digital generation are used to being recorded via webcam or even on a smartphone, being in front of a television camera creates a completely different atmosphere.

Since television is a visual medium, appearance is important. In terms of clothing, avoid too much contrast between colors, like black on white. Also avoid clothing that is too striped or patterned, as it may bleed onscreen (Lewis, 1966). Keep in mind that jewelry, watches, or anything reflective may catch the studio lights and create a distracting glare on camera. Also avoid wearing colors that are close to your skin tone (Hyde, 1983). You may be offered makeup; if you are, take it.

Once you are on set, you'll need to orient yourself to the surroundings. Hopefully there will be a producer or other staff person there to explain things to you. You will want to be aware of video and audio monitors. Video monitors are televisions that allow the on-air person to monitor their movements and see what viewers are seeing. One usually shows the video feed exactly as it

will appear on viewer's screens and one may be a fixed monitor that basically functions as a mirror so you can see that you are framed properly and look all right. Avoid the common temptation to stare at or constantly check the monitors.

In terms of audio, there may be a lavaliere microphone that will be attached to you beforehand. In some situations you may also get an audio monitor that allows you to hear yourself, studio producers, or another person communicating with you off site. If off-camera producers need to communicate with you, the monitor may be an earpiece, which is standard for news anchors. If you are doing a remote live segment, the sound monitor will likely be a simple speaker. You may be asked to do microphone, sound, and video checks. Just follow the instructions, but make sure to speak up if something doesn't seem to be working right. You want to make sure you can hear and see what you need to.



Figure 17.4.2: Television studios are fast-paced, technical environments that can make speakers very nervous if they aren't prepared. Sascha Grant – The Reviewers – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

It's OK to practice what you're going to say aloud a few times before you actually present. People in television studios are used to on-air announcers and reporters walking around talking to themselves. As with radio, think about the audience you're reaching as individuals rather than a mass of people. Develop a mental picture of a definite person watching, which will help you create the illusion of a personal connection to the viewer (Lewis, 1966). I'm sure we've all been drawn into that illusion many times, even though we know better. As a fan of Brian Williams and the NBC Nightly News, I catch myself saying goodnight to Brian after he says goodnight to me (and a few million other people) at the end of his broadcast.

Once the recording begins, become your own director by monitoring your communication (Lewis, 1966). Do not monitor yourself so much that you get stuck in your head, worrying about the camera, the monitor, and where to look to the point that you forget to use even normal facial expressions and vocal variety. Remember that your face conveys your thoughts and emotions, sometimes without you knowing it. Don't try to impersonate other people's facial expressions and tone of voice, because it will probably come off as an imitation, rather than as genuine. Hand motions should be a little slower on television than in real life, but don't overthink them either. Remember to keep your head up as much as possible, so only divert your eyes down to review notes; don't let your whole head turn down. Avoid extra movements and stay on your mark if you are given one. A mark may be made using tape on the floor and indicates where you should stand. If a camera is zoomed in, even a small movement can take you out of the frame or out of focus. Movements can also take you out of set lighting or a sound area.

When speaking to someone else on camera, you will need to "cheat out" a little, which may seem awkward in person but will look fine on camera. When we talk to someone, we usually face him or her directly, but on television that would leave us with only a profile shot. Each person should be at about a 25-degree angle from each other so they can see and talk to each other but also be open to the camera. When addressing the camera, look at the lens and focus about a foot behind it, because that creates the illusion that you are looking at the viewer (Hyde, 1983). If you are going to be presenting to more than one camera, be prepared to shift your focus. You will usually get a cue from a producer and can then follow the "tally light," which is the red light above the camera. Producers usually give these signals very close to the camera, but you will need to rely on your peripheral vision and not let your focus be shifted to the signaler. You do not need to send a message back, nonverbally or verbally, that the signal has been received (Hyde, 1983).

At the end of a television segment, especially a live one, you may have to hold a position as a segment is tossed to another presenter or there is a transition to a commercial break. Don't assume you are off the air until someone tells you. You don't want to end up with a blooper where you say something embarrassing or start to get up before you are off camera. It may feel like an eternity, but be prepared to hold your position for a few moments while looking into the camera, at the monitor, or at another person.

Media Interview

People often appear on the radio or television as a result of participating in a media interview with a reporter or radio or television representative. Handling a media interview is also something that many people aren't prepared for. Unless you are responding to a crisis situation, which we will discuss later, you will likely have time to prepare for a media interview. Make sure to use this time. If you are contacted by a reporter or station representative to schedule an interview, the first thing you should do is ask some preliminary questions to help with your interview preparation.

Questions to Ask before a Media Interview(KC Associations, 2012)

- Who will be interviewing me?
- How can I access some of this person's previous interviews?
- What is the segment or show I will be featured on?
- What information will you need from me?
- Will the interview be live?
- How long will the interview last?
- If the interview is being recorded and edited, how long will the aired segment be?
- Is there a deadline for the story?

If the interview is part of a series, you may also ask whom they've already talked to and what information they have already gotten (Wadsworth, 2005). Don't feel like you have to begin the interview right away or agree to the interview on the spot. You can ask the person to give you a little time to prepare and then get back in touch with them.

Once you have gotten some preliminary information, do some research on the interviewer and the organization he or she represents. If the interview is about a personal context, then you have more freedom with your content. If you are representing a company or organization, you will want to contact your supervisor before accepting an interview. Many companies have policies about who can speak to the media, and some even have communications departments or designated speakers that they assign to such roles. If you are given approval to do the interview, you will probably want to run your content by your supervisor for approval as well.

Then come up with two to three key messages or main points that you want to convey in the interview. Interviews that aren't live are usually edited, and only some of what you say will make it into the final cut. Due to time constraints, media interviewers are often looking for the "sound bite": a verbal bullet point that is about ten seconds or twenty-six words long. While this can be frustrating, especially when you're discussing a complicated and contextual topic, it is a media reality. Think of a sound bite as a verbal bullet point for your speech.

A Good Sound Bite(Wadsworoth, 2005)

- Is about ten seconds or twenty-six words for radio or television
- Connects to something current, culturally relevant, or of interest to the public
- Mentions you and/or your company's name (media interviews are often good publicity)
- Offers a claim and some brief support for the claim
- Paints a picture
- Is memorable and leaves a lasting impression

So narrowing your content down to these few main points and then identifying some key sound bites within the points will ensure that at least some of the important material will make it into the story instead of something you get sidetracked onto.

Many people doing television or radio interviews are afraid of creating dead air and say more than they need to, which can get the interview off track. When interviews get off track, you may only be able to address one of your three main points—remember television and radio segments are usually short. The interviewers are more afraid of dead air than the interviewee is, and it's their job to worry about it, so you can stop answering the question once you've addressed it and let them make the next move.

Be concise in your answers to the interviewer's questions. If they need more information, they will ask follow-up questions. If an interviewer tries to get you "off message," be prepared to briefly engage the question and pivot back to your prepared content; in some cases, it is even OK to deflect the question by saying something like "That's not really what I thought we were going to talk about today. I'm here to discuss..." Although politicians often dodge legitimate questions, you can watch them interact with the press for pointers on how to pivot and stay on message.

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, but offer to follow up if the question is relevant to your expertise and experience or refer the interviewer to someone else who may have the answer. Don't answer a question with "No comment," as that arouses suspicion. It is OK to tell an interviewer that their question falls outside of your area of expertise, falls outside of the scope of the interview as you understood it, or gets into issues of privacy that you cannot discuss due to ethics or policy.

Interviewers, especially if they are reporters, are good at making you feel like you are only talking to them. While this is true in the case of the interview, don't forget that you are actually talking to a larger audience of viewers and/or listeners, so keep them in mind. After the interview, ask the interviewee what they are likely to use in the final segment. You may also want to follow up with a written record of any specific facts, especially if it's technical or needs to be precise.

Speaking on Behalf of Others

Some careers specifically involve speaking on behalf of others. For example, spokespeople, crisis communicators, and other public relations professionals speak for other individuals or organizations. Many organizations do not have designated spokespeople, so you may just find yourself speaking on behalf of others because you were asked or told to. This section explores specific communication skills and knowledge that are useful when speaking for others.

Speaking as a Spokesperson or Representative

Organizations that do not have public relations or communications departments may tap someone as needed to interact with the media or release a statement. Spokespeople speak to external audiences, primarily the media, on behalf of an individual or group. Some key attributes for an effective spokesperson are the abilities to establish rapport, tell an engaging story, handle difficult and unexpected questions, respond to nonverbal cues, and adjust communication to match audience preferences (SpokesComm, 2012). Ideally, spokespeople facilitate a question-and-answer session after they present their statement. We have all seen people read prepared statements and then retreat without addressing questions, which usually creates a negative impression. Spokespeople must maintain their credibility, and being open is a way to do this.



Figure 17.4.3:: A spokesperson must be perceived as credible to effectively deliver the message of another person or group. AMISOM P Information – AMISOM Spokesperson Handover 05 – public domain.

To prepare for questions and answers, corporate spokespeople are usually given briefing materials to review. They are sometimes given question-and-answer (Q&A) documents that have been drafted ahead of time that contain examples of friendly and hostile

questions that may be asked (Gibson, 2012). The spokesperson should be involved in drafting the answers rather than being expected to read them as a script. Audiences can usually tell when someone isn't speaking his or her own words, which raises suspicion. The message can still be carefully crafted, but it will appear more natural if the spokesperson is a coauthor of the message. Spokespeople may rely on particular phrases to enhance the audience's perception of their honesty. This becomes problematic when the phrases are overused and therefore lose their meaning. Some examples of phrases to avoid overusing are "to be perfectly honest," "frankly," and "truthfully."

Being an effective spokesperson requires training and preparation (Gibson, 2012). Spokespeople should be evaluated and assessed in simulations to help prepare for delivering actual messages. Once a spokesperson is in the job, a debriefing should follow every interview to evaluate strengths and weaknesses. As with many other types of presentations, watching a video recording for evaluation purposes can be instructive. Some spokespeople are communications professionals who have general training in communication skills. There are also subject matter experts who serve as spokespeople. These speakers are useful when dealing with complex information, but they should also be trained in communication skills—content knowledge is not enough to be a good spokesperson. Speakers who are subject matter experts should avoid acronyms and other forms of insider language and be able to convey their message in concrete terms. It may be useful to pair a subject matter expert up with a communication expert and have the communication expert set up the interview and then turn it over to the subject matter expert.

Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is a fast-growing field of study within communication studies as many businesses and organizations realize the value in finding someone to prepare for potential crises, interact with stakeholders during a crisis, and assess crisis responses after they have occurred. Crisis communication occurs as a result of a major event outside of normal expectations that has potential negative results, runs the risk of escalating in intensity, may result in close media or government scrutiny, and creates pressure for a timely and effective response (Zaremba, 2010). Some examples of crises include natural disasters, management/employee misconduct, product tampering or failure, and workplace violence.

The need for crisis communication professionals is increasing, as various developments have made organizations more susceptible to crises (Coombs, 2012). Since the 1990s, organizations have increasingly viewed their reputations as assets that must be protected. Whereas reputations used to be built on word-of-mouth communication and one-on-one relationships, technology, mass media, and now social media have made it easier for stakeholders to praise or question an organization's reputation. A Facebook post or a Tweet can now turn into widespread consumer activism that organizations must be able to respond to quickly and effectively. In addition, organizations are being held liable for "negligent failure to plan," which means that an organization didn't take "reasonable action to reduce or eliminate known or reasonably foreseeable risks that could result in harm" (Coombs, 2012). Look around your classroom and the academic building you are in. You will likely see emergency plans posted that may include instructions on what to do in situations ranging from a tornado, to a power outage, to an active shooter. As a response to the mass shooting that took place at Virginia Tech in 2006, most colleges and universities now have emergency notification systems and actively train campus police and faculty and staff on what to do in the case of an active shooter on campus. Post–Virginia Tech, a campus's failure to institute such procedures could be deemed as negligent failure to plan if a similar incident were to occur on that campus.

Crisis communicators don't just interact with the media; they communicate with a variety of stakeholders. Stakeholders are the various audiences that have been identified as needing information during a crisis. These people and groups have a "stake" in the organization or the public interest or as a user of a product or service. Internal stakeholders are people within an organization or focal area, such as employees and management. External stakeholders are people outside the organization or focal area such as customers, clients, media, regulators, and the general public (Zaremba, 2010).

Four main areas of crisis communication research are relationships, reputation, responsibility, and response (Zaremba, 2010). Relationships and reputation are built and maintained before a crisis occurs. Organizations create relationships with their stakeholders, and their track record of quality, customer service, dependability, and communication determines their reputation. *Responsibility* refers to the degree to which stakeholders hold an organization responsible for the crisis at hand. Judgments about responsibility will vary depending on the circumstances of a crisis. An unpreventable natural disaster will be interpreted differently than a product failure resulting from cutting corners on maintenance work to save money. *Response* refers to how an organization reacts to a crisis in terms of its communication and behaviors.

"Getting Real"

Crisis Communication Professionals

Crisis communication professionals create crisis communication plans that identify internal and external audiences that need information during crisis events. Effective crisis communication plans can lessen the impact of or even prevent crises. Aside from preparing for crises and identifying stakeholders/audiences, crisis communicators also construct the messages to be communicated to the stakeholders and select the channels through which those messages will be sent. The crisis communicator or another representative could deliver a speech or press conference, send messages through social media, send e-mail or text message blasts out, or buy ad space in newspapers or on television (Zaremba, 2010).

Crisis communicators must have good public speaking skills. Communicating during a crisis naturally increases anxiety, so it's important that speakers have advanced skills at managing anxiety and apprehension. In terms of delivery, while there will be times when impromptu responses are necessary—for example, during a question-and-answer period—manuscript or extemporaneous delivery are the best options. It is also important that a crisis communicator be skilled at developing ethos, or credibility as a speaker. This is an important part of the preparatory stages of crisis communication when relationships are formed and reputations are established. The importance of ethos is related to the emphasis on honesty and disclosure over stonewalling and denial.

A myth regarding crisis communicators is that their goal is to "spin" a message to adjust reality or create an illusion that makes their organization look better. While some crisis communicators undoubtedly do this, it is not the best practice in terms of effectiveness, competence, or ethics. Crisis communication research and case studies show that honesty is the best policy. A quick and complete disclosure may create more scrutiny or damage in the short term, but it can minimize reputational damage in the long term (Zaremba, 2010). Denying a problem, blaming others instead of taking responsibility, or ignoring a problem in hope that it will go away may actually prolong media coverage, invite more investigation, and permanently damage an organization's image.

1. Why do you think extemporaneous and manuscript delivery are the preferred delivery methods for crisis communicators? What do these delivery styles offer that memorized and impromptu do not? In what situations would it be better to have a manuscript? To deliver extemporaneously?
2. Consider the following scenario, which we all hope we will never encounter: Several reports come into the campus police station that gunshots were heard outside the administrative building on campus. Eyewitnesses say that an unidentified armed person was seen walking into the building. Answer the following questions based on what you have learned about crisis communication: Who are the internal and external stakeholders in this situation? As a student (and stakeholder), what steps would you want your organization to take in response to this situation? What message should be sent? To whom should the message be sent? What media channels should be used?

Key Takeaways

- Although radio and television are mass-communication media, presenters should imagine that they are speaking to select individuals rather than a mass crowd. Radio and television try to create the illusion of a personal connection between the speaker and audience.
- Radio requires verbal and nonverbal communication skills even though it is an aural form of media. People not used to speaking on the radio should prepare for the possibility of experiencing "mic fright."
- Since television is a visual media, appearance is important. Certain types of clothes, makeup, and accessories are preferred for people presenting on air. Be prepared to work with audio and video monitors to help make sure you can see and hear what you need to while you are presenting. Avoid extra movements once you are put on your mark, as camera angles, lighting, and sound may be set to cover only a limited area.
- Ask questions before a media interview to ensure that you can be adequately prepared. Come up with two to three key messages and some relevant "sound bites," and then stay on those messages during the interview.
- Spokespeople need to be good at establishing rapport, storytelling, and managing their nonverbal communication. Even though spokespeople deliver other people's messages, they should be involved in drafting the wording of the messages so their communication sounds natural and not forced.
- As organizations realize the increasing value of their reputations and the power of social media to rapidly enhance or destroy a reputation, they are more frequently employing crisis communication professionals who prepare for before, coordinate the response during, and assess an organization's response after a crisis.

Exercises

1. Have you ever spoken on the radio or television? If so, how did your experiences match up with the content of this section? If not, what would you be worried and/or excited about?
2. Come up with three good "sound bites" related to the current speech you're working on. Make sure to follow the guidelines for a good sound bite outlined in this section.
3. Do some Internet research to find an example of an organization that responded poorly to a crisis situation. What could they have done better based on the information you learned in this chapter? (Doing a Google search for "crisis communication case study," or some other related terms, will help you find an example.)

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Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

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